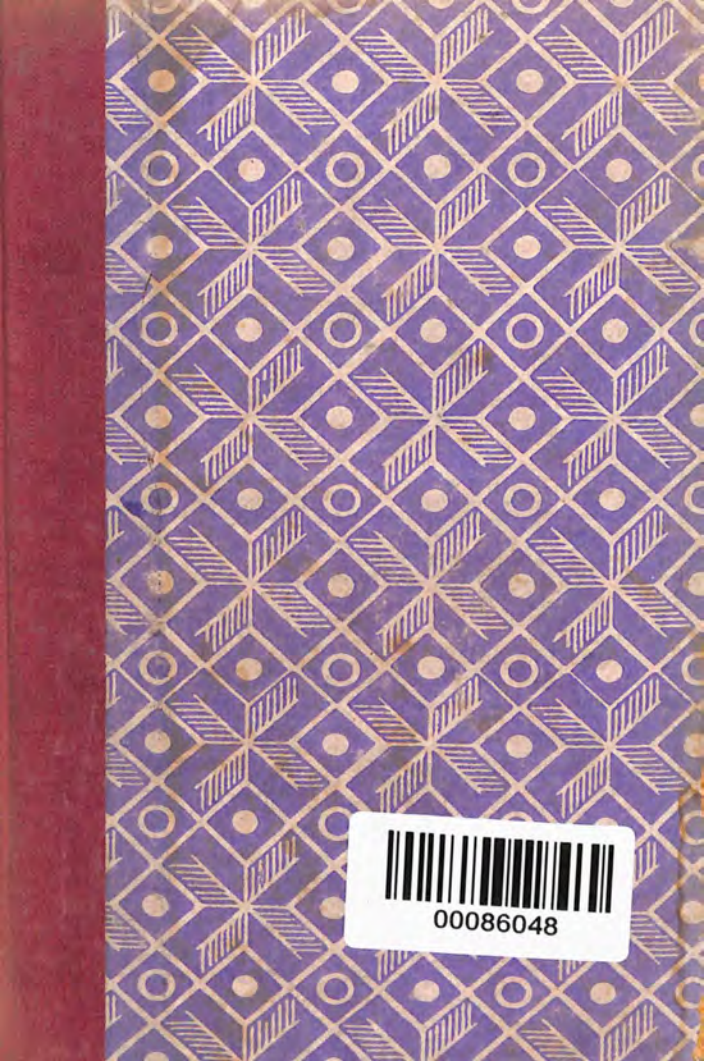
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REYKJAVIK. — ICELAND.

A

WINTER

ICELAND AND LAPLAND.

BY

THE HON. ARTHUR DILLON.

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QC

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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A WINTER IN ICELAND.

CHAPTER I.

Voyage from Copenhagen to Reikiavik—Prince of Denmark—Visit to Bessestad.

In the beginning of 1834 I determined on seeing Iceland, and learning something of the manners of the natives of that country. After many inquiries at Lloyd's and other such places, I found that there existed no direct communication between England and Iceland: I

decided, therefore, on proceeding at once to Copenhagen, and taking a passage in one of the regular traders that leave Denmark every spring for that island. In order to avoid the almost impracticable road between Hamburg and Lubec, I chose the way of Gottenburg. A newly-established steamer took me from Hull to that port in sixty hours, but on landing I found that owing to the bad management of the steam-packets in that quarter, three days would elapse before the arrival of the Prinds Carl, a vessel plying between Christiania and Copenhagen, and calling on her route at Gottenburg.

At the moment the delay occasioned by this was no source of regret, as it gave me an opportunity of visiting whatever is remarkable in the town and its environs. Great, however, was my disappointment on reaching the Danish capital, in finding that the last ship destined to sail for some time to Iceland had weighed anchor the night previous, and actually passed us under the Castle of Helsingore. The mer-

chant from whom I got this unwelcome intelligence, could only offer me the chance of a passage in one of two ships which he expected would return to Copenhagen about the middle of July.

To employ the intervening time, I wandered through Sweden from Gottenburg to Stockholm, and from the confines of Lapland to Malmoe. After getting scorched by day and frozen by night in the forests of Bothnia, viewing the treasures in the depths of the silver and copper mines of Dalecârlia, every where delighted by the beauties of the scenery and the urbanity of the inhabitants, I returned again to Denmark. Here my expectations were again to be disappointed. Of the two ships that were looked for in Copenhagen, the merchant informed me, one had been wrecked on the Icelandic coast, and the other was not yet returned. He endeavoured to dissuade me from undertaking the voyage that year. The season he said, was too far advanced, and should I

reach Iceland, my stay there must necessarily be very short, as the ship would delay its return to Denmark as little as possible. If, however, I was determined on proceeding, he recommended me as a preferable alternative to try to procure a passage in a Danish man-of-war, which would shortly be sent to fetch back the Prince of Denmark. This personage, owing to some disagreement with his father-in-law the king, had been sent to spend the summer in that remote quarter of the world.

Such a boon was hardly to be looked for; but upon mentioning the subject to a gentleman of the English Legation, he had the goodness to give me a letter to the admiral at the head of the marine. This officer mentioned my request to the king, who was pleased to allow me a passage to Reikiavik. On the 10th of August we set sail, but, owing to the wind being unfavourable, we anchored the same afternoon at Helsingore.

The Nyad was a corvette, of twenty guns,

chiefly used for exercising the cadets of the royal navy. Instead of being put on board men-of-war from first starting, the youngsters in Denmark are kept at a naval college till they are considered qualified to be appointed to ships as lieutenants, and are sent out in the summer for a three months' cruise to give them an insight into seamanship. The officers consisted of the captain, commander, and four lieutenants, who, as is the case with all their naval officers, spoke English as well as natives; two of them had been for some years in the French service, and wore the cross of the legion of honour, for being at Navarino and Algiers.

I found a fellow-passenger on board, with whom I had much conversation during the voyage, and who gave me much information about the country we were going to. He was a native of Iceland, who had distinguished himself as a boy at the school of Bessestad, and had subsequently attained the highest honours at the University of Copenhagen. At the conclusion

of his studies, he had undertaken to travel over the greater part of Europe, and had traversed France, Italy, Greece, and had been a short time in England. As a reward for his exertions the King of Denmark had conferred on him the church of Breide-Bolstadir, which is considered to be the most lucrative benefice in Iceland. He had not been home for several years. The prospect of returning with classical honours, and in possession of comparative independence must have been particularly delightful, as he left his country a poor and solitary student with little hope of advancement. He understood English and French pretty well, but finding that he spoke Italian very fluently, I preferred using that language with him, which had become habitual to me during nine years' residence in Tuscany.

There was no change of wind till the third day, on which we weighed anchor, and as the guns of Kronberg, the castle commanding the Sound, responded to the corvette's salute, we bade farewell in good earnest to Denmark.

The battlements on which Hamlet's father revisited the glimpses of the moon—the beautiful gardens of Marienlyst in which the tomb of Ophelia's lover, as well as the pool in which the damsel is supposed, by the ardent admirers of the fable, to have really drowned herself, are still pointed out; and lastly the isle of Hveen, where Tycho Brahe made his astronomical discoveries, gradually faded from the sight, and we continued on our course up the Cattegat.

On the evening of the thirteenth day we passed by Fair Isle, a small, lofty rock, inhabited by a few fishermen, and lying midway between the Shetlands and the Orkneys. Early next morning we were welcomed into the Atlantic by a gale of wind, and Foul Island, the most westerly of the Shetlands, appeared under our lee. A large three-masted ship, at first close to us, kept driving rapidly to leeward, and in all probability long before night left its wreck on the ill-omened isle. After a

lapse of three days the weather moderated, and we passed to the southward of the Feroe Isles, though not sufficiently near to see them. The change of latitude began now to be apparent by the temperature, and the thermometer fell twenty degrees of Reaumur, in the course of half as many days.

On making the south-western extremity of Iceland we encountered another heavy gale, accompanied with much rain and thick weather. After four days we had a favorable change, and the horizon being clear, we were enabled on the 21st day to see the land bearing N.E., and found that we were near the northern side of Faxè Fiord. The land before us, as viewed from the deck, formed a deep semicircular bay, bounded on the N.W. by the snow-capped Snœfiell Jokul, and its southern extremity was enclosed by a range of mountains, that run through the whole of Gulbringè Syssel, among which rose conspicuously a single mountain, called Koile and Sukkertopper from its pre-

senting the form of a perfect cone from every point of view. Along the coast lofty black mountains frowned in bleak majesty, terminating close to the water's edge, and strongly indented by deep friths, which penetrated into the interior as far as the eye could reach.

In the morning a pilot, for whom signals had been fired overnight, made his appearance in the distance: he presently came on board with two companions. The latter were in very sorry plight; they had been out all night, and their drenched clothes, together with their long hair, and unshaved faces, gave them by no means a prepossessing appearance. They steered us through some small islands, and brought us to anchor within a quarter of a mile of Reikiavik. There were but five ships in the harbour, and of these three were only awaiting our arrival to set sail, which they did that very evening. From the anchorage the town presented little more than an assemblage of red flags, as it is so low that

the roof only of the houses are visible from the water.

The captain, followed by some of his officers, my fellow-passenger, and myself, proceeded at once to the government house, a long stone building, formerly used as a prison. The exterior resembles a farm-house, and is whitewashed. Its only floor is surmounted by a lofty wooden roof, which contains garrets. In front a pretty well cultivated garden, with a stream flowing along the bottom of it, is entered by a neat wooden bridge. Altogether, though not very viceregal in its appearance, the house bore externally a far greater look of comfort than would have been expected by a stranger. On either side of the entrance were four good-sized windows, and at the back peeped out some smart timber buildings, painted red, evidently offices, which gave a relief to the white walls of the house.

M. de Kreiger, the governor, was at the door

in a scarlet uniform, waiting to receive the party; and having read a letter which I put into his hands, from a friend of his in London, he presented me to the exiled prince, who was lately returned from the interior, and had been anxiously waiting to embark for Denmark. This personage, who is the heir presumptive to the Danish throne, but whose chances of succession are at best problematical, was a young man of about five-and-twenty, rather short and slight, and of a general appearance not much calculated to draw attention. His suite consisted of two naval lieutenants, as aides-de-camp, and a physician, and a painter, though not exactly attached to his establishment, accompanied him in his excursions. The hurry of the prince to quit the seat of his banishment was such, that at first he proposed departing at once; but, upon consideration, his sailing was postponed till the following evening, so as to give him an opportunity of taking leave of the people in the neighbouring villages.

The governor invited me to dinner in the afternoon, where I met about twenty persons, chiefly officers, and a few merchants who had not yet returned to Copenhagen. The viands on the table in every respect surpassed what the climate of Reikiavik would have led me to expect. Among the numerous dishes there was no lack of vegetables, though they were necessarily limited in kinds and size. Broccoli, potatoes, salad, and cabbages about the size of a small orange, formed the principal. After dinner, the company adjourned to a neighbouring room, to indulge in cigars and coffee; and an Icelander, who had learnt to speak English during the course of several voyages to Leith, in the war-time, took me to a house kept by the merchants for the purpose of social meeting and card-playing. The latter amusement was not attempted that night, as a considerable number of the members appeared inclined to keep wassail after the true Danish style. One little round man in particular, whose rubicund face beamed

with universal benevolence, was bent on doing the honours of the place, and pursued me every where vociferating in an unknown tongue, which I afterwards found out was intended for French. The only foreigner there, was a countryman from Liverpool, who had been settled there upwards of twenty years, and had married an Icelander. After midnight, finding that the company, though diminished in numbers, was only increasing in joviality, I took my leave of the merry companions, and made the best of my way in the dark to my lodgings.

My clerical friend had procured me apartments in the house of a merchant, who had sailed that morning for Copenhagen. They consisted of two rooms, much too lofty for so severe a climate, and destitute of stove or fireplace: an objection which obliged me three months afterwards to quit them, and seek for comfort in an humbler dwelling. As the furniture had been brought from Denmark, nothing but its scantiness would have been remarked; its

great cleanliness, however, a quality not every where found in Iceland was enough to make one overlook many deficiencies.

Walking down the street next morning, I heard my name called out of a very neat farm-house, by one of the corvette's lieutenants, and was asked in to breakfast by the owner of it, the *landfoged*, or treasurer of the land. The repast was of the most substantial kind, seasoned by copious libations of champagne, in honour of the toasts which the prince proposed in taking farewell. At the announcement of each new toast, the whole of the company stood up and touched each other's glasses, an operation which took up several minutes, and prolonged the breakfast to the period usually allotted to a long dinner.

After breakfast we all mounted the horses of the prince, and started in a party for Havnifiord and Bessestad. At our departure, and indeed during the whole of the day, it rained heavily, but to bad weather most of us had been

so much accustomed that no one noticed it. The first hour's ride was over ground alternately marshy and rocky, over which the ponies scrambled with great agility. The coasting of three deep fiords considerably lengthened the way, and compelled us to cross as many streams. Leaving behind us the last of these, we entered a part of the country entirely covered with lava; the ground had lost all appearance of vegetation, and presented nothing to the sight—but a field of black cinders, produced by the burning of the stone. The track along which we now followed one another in single file, appeared formed by nature, and had been but little worn by the continued tread of horses for the last thousand years; for the eruption which has laid waste this plain occurred before the discovery of the island, and it is remarkable that no volcanic mountain is to be found in the immediate neighbourhood, so that the plain itself must have been in a state of combustion. The path is very tortuous, and descends into ravines

and hollows from fifty or sixty feet deep. At a sudden turn in the road, the roof of one of the houses of Havnifiord peeps out, and a large bay is discovered surrounded with lava, that gives shelter to the buildings clustered between it and the sea. When seen for the first time, this "Hraun," as it is called in Icelandic, has a most awful appearance, and the mind can hardly form a more terrible picture of a tract of country over which the arm of a destroying angel has been stretched. A deathlike silence reigns on all sides, only occasionally broken by the shrill note of the golden plover, and the frequent recurrence of beacons, points out to the stranger the inevitable fate that attends in winter the traveller who deviates but a few inches from the intricate path.

Four timber dwellings and several warehouses of the same materials, together with about forty or fifty Icelandic cottages, constitute the trading town of Havnifiord. The latter are universally distinguished from the houses of Danes by the

name of "Bai," and are little better than hovels constructed of turf and stones. Their owners live chiefly by fishing in the bay; an occupation in which, from the shelter afforded by the surrounding lava, they are seldom interrupted by bad weather. At a short distance these huts are scarcely distinguished from the ground they stand upon, and merely look like knolls where the grass has found enough soil to grow.

The arrival of the prince was greeted by a display of the national colours from each of the commercial establishments, and while he and his aides-de-camp were bidding adieu to the merchants, their wives brought in wine and chocolate, which are almost always offered to strangers on paying a visit. As we had still many miles to ride, we quitted Havnifiord after an hour's stay, and crossing the "Hraun" by another path, we entered a large circular space about half a mile in diameter, which had not been touched by the lava. It was, in fact, an oasis in the desert; no outlet was to be seen, and it

seemed that the liquid mass, in running towards it from every quarter, had been suddenly checked, and left this green spot to show what had been the state of the rest before the catastrophe had happened.

A narrow and almost invisible passage let us out of this meadow, and brought us, after a couple of miles, to Alftanœs, a promontory covered with fishermen's huts. Among a few houses of a better sort, was to be marked that of the late Justitiarius of the Land's-over-Rett, or High Court, who had rendered his dwelling and the surrounding grounds as pleasant as the situation would allow. The principal object, however, at Alftanœs is the school of Bessestad, which was removed to this place from Reikiavik about forty years ago. The house, formerly inhabited by the governors of Iceland, was, on their removing to their present residence, given up with the adjoining buildings to the teachers and students. The house, before its change of inhabitants, rejoiced in the high-

sounding name of Kongens Gaard, or King's Residence, and has large and lofty rooms, some of them painted with various designs, but altogether in a rather dilapidated state. The apartments on the ground-floor have been converted into lecture-rooms and refectories, and some chambers for the "Œconomus," who superintends the domestic arrangements of the institution. The garrets are fitted up as dormitories for the forty scholars, while the professors have houses provided for them at the back.

None of the scholars were there when we called, as the term only begins in October, and ends in May. The object of this division of the year is to give the youths an opportunity of returning home and assisting their parents in agricultural labours during the summer, and of employing that time in study when little more than fishing can be done. The expense of residing at the college during the eight months amounts to the trifling sum of thirty-three dollars and a third, and even this is, in many

cases, paid by the king. I do not believe that the number of scholars exceeds forty, nor is it likely that many more than that number would seek admission, as none but those intended for the church, or some judicial capacity, ever think of undergoing that which with them is looked upon as a sort of university education. Their studies consist in acquiring the Danish language, and a considerable knowledge of divinity, history, and the principles of astronomy. The classics also form a principal part of their pursuits; they are allowed to choose between Greek and Hebrew, in neither of which, I believe, they make any progress beyond the first elements; but all learn Latin, and to some more purpose than boys in England, for I never met with any one who had been brought up at Bessestad who could not in some way carry on a conversation in that tongue.

The church attached to the college is the largest in Iceland, and one of the only four that are built of stone. In form it is but a mere

oblong, with a tower at one end, which is the only thing that would prevent it being taken for a barn. The interior is filled with open seats, and has a glazed pew elevated in the form of a gallery, over the heads of the congregation, intended for the use of the governor, while attending divine service. On the left of the chancel the stone effigy of a governor of the seventeenth century, which had been lying many years in the entrance porch, has lately been restored by the Œconomus. The viceroy is represented about the size of life, in complete armour, bearing a two-handed sword; the execution is indifferent, and is probably foreign. The other ornaments are some wretched daubs of saints, painted on the panels of two shutters that cover the altar-piece; during prayers these are opened, and present the writhing countenances of a dozen men, in as many varieties of contortion. The pulpit has also its compartments ornamented with figures of apostles or evangelists, in the execution of which the artist has

carefully avoided a breach of the second commandment.

In the evening the governor, who was to leave the country, repeated his invitation to dinner, where I found a still larger party than the day before. On this occasion the prince made a long valedictory speech, and when the due quantity of champagne had been drunk, and the glasses had been sufficiently often clinked, the royal exile rose and proceeded to the beach, accompanied by his suite. The Esiuberg mountains on the opposite side of the bay of Reikiavik re-echoed, perhaps for the first time, with a salute; and, before the following morning, he was far from the Icelandic coast on his way to Fredericks, a small town of Jutland, of which he had been appointed governor.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST SETTLEMENT IN ICELAND.

Naddodr—Gardar—Ingolf—The reasons that made him emigrate—Supposed visits of Christian Irish to Iceland before Ingolf's time—The first settlers—Their manners—Dress—Commerce—Amusements.

THE history of Iceland can be traced, with certainty, up to the time of its discovery towards the end of the ninth century. It has had more historians than many countries of far greater population, and thanks to its remoteness from all others, and the absence of the wars which have destroyed so many records through-

out the rest of Europe, their works have been handed down to posterity unimpaired. They present to us a minute picture of the manners, during almost a thousand years, of a people, in whom we may behold all the characteristics of the Scandinavians, ferocity excepted, unchanged by either time or intercourse with other nations.

Secluded as this island is, by its position, from the rest of the world, we cannot expect to have our attention drawn to such stirring events as those which have occurred in the rest of Europe. The space, however, which in the annals of other nations is taken up with wars and revolutions, is, in theirs, filled by still more appalling misfortunes. The devastations of earthquakes followed by famine, form the principal features of their history. But they have a still higher claim on our sympathy:—our respect and admiration are due to a people who, surrounded by difficulties, and struggling with poverty, emerged from the barbarism

which then shrouded Europe; and though since fallen from their original state of independence, yet continue to maintain a character which would reflect credit on the most civilized nation.

Naddodr, a pirate of some celebrity, was the first person known to have landed in this country on a voyage from Norway to the Feroe Isles; he was driven, in A.D. 860, by tempestuous weather on the eastern coast, not far from a mountain called Riedarfiall. His account of this newly-discovered country, stated it to be entirely destitute of inhabitants, and covered with snow—whence he gave it its first name Snœland. A Swede named Gardar Sverison hearing of this discovery, resolved to visit the new country; he touched on the eastern coast and continued his course to the north, he passed the winter of the year 864 in a bay of the northern district, called Skialfanda, and named the harbour Husavick from the houses which he had erected for his crew during their

sojourn. On his return home he changed the name of Snœland to Gardarsholm, or Gardar's isle, having been the first to circumnavigate it.

The reports of these adventurers having encouraged others to follow in their track, the next who directed his course that way was Floki Vilgerdarson, also a pirate. Setting sail from a port in Norway named probably from himself Flokiwarda, he arrived at Shetland, at that time called Hiatland: his daughter Geirhilda who accompanied him, being lost in a swamp, he left that place, and steered towards Iceland: having no better way of keeping a right course he had taken some ravens with him from Hiatland, the first of these that he liberated returned to its home. After proceeding on his voyage for some time with a favourable wind he released another which hovered awhile above him and then settled on the yards. The third, however, which was freed when the voyage was more than half concluded, took its flight in the

direction of the island. Following in its track, Floki, like his predecessors, first got sight of land on the eastern coast. Shortly after he entered the bay between Reikianœs and Snœfelsnœs, a distance of twelve Icelandic miles. A Scottish sailor named Faxe whom he had on board pronounced this bay to be the estuary of a river; Floki to ridicule his ignorance called it Faxe-os, or Faxe's-mouth a name which it retains to the present day. Thence he passed on to Beidafroid, and wintered in Vatnsfiord in the Syssel of Bardastrand. During that period he supported his crew on fish, which abounded in the bay; on the coming of spring the weather did not abate in rigour, on the contrary the bay was soon filled with sea-ice, driven probably from Greenland; this circumstance caused a second change in the name of the island and induced Floki to give it the one it now bears, in consequence of finding his ship enclosed in the harbour, and every thing in sight bearing the same frozen appearance. The seve-

rity of the cold and the hardships which he underwent, do not, however, seem to have daunted him, for we find that he passed a second winter in the southern part of the island and at last returned to Norway, when in consequence of the use he had made of ravens on his voyage, he was surnamed Rafne Floki.

Such is the account given of the discovery of Iceland by the first three men who landed in it. They each represent it not only as a desert, but entirely without traces of any inhabitants, a condition however in which it was not destined to continue much longer. The state of Norway was undergoing a very material change, in consequence of the resolution that Harold Haafagre had formed of uniting the whole of that country under his sway. It is said that he was first incited to this desire of supreme dominion by the taunt of a princess who refused to accept his hand in marriage, while he remained a mere yarl, the title given to the numerous petty sovereigns of Norway.

Fired at this rebuff, Harold made a vow to leave his hair uncut, till he should have reduced the whole of the Yarls, and hence arose the name of Haarfagre, or Fair-haired, that was from that time applied to him. Justice to his neighbours was incompatible with the strict fulfilment of his vow; but the Norwegian did not allow any scruple to stand in the way of his wishes, his acts of aggression were such as to drive many of the weaker nobles from their country. It is to the civil war that was thus lighted up in Norway, and to the numerous expulsions consequent on it, that the rapid colonization of such a dreary country as Iceland is to be attributed; and it is also owing to the same causes that the first emigrants, far from being the dregs of their own nation, were chiefly from the noblest and most independent families in Norway. As the reason that induced the first settler, Ingolf, to seek a new home, arose from different circumstances, the account of it is dwelt upon more at large in the ancient Sagas.

Ingolf, the son of On, a Norwegian of noble extraction and distinguished valour, had a sister named Helga, who is represented as graced with exquisite beauty, and adorned with every virtue and accomplishment that the Scandinavians admired in the female character. This damsel was beloved by her cousin, Leif, more commonly known by the surname of Hiorleif, which he had acquired in Ireland from having taken the sword of one of its petty kings in battle. In the same part of Norway as Ingolf, and in habits of intimacy with him and Hiorleif, dwelt three youths, who rejoiced in the euphonous names of Hallstein, Holmstein, and Herstein. At one of those noisy feasts which, together with battles, furnished the Skalds with the principal subjects of their songs, the youngest of the three brothers raised the cup to his lips, and made a vow either to obtain the hand of Helga, or to forego marriage for the rest of his life. Ingolf, greatly irritated by this declaration, announced to the assembled guests his intention of withholding his sister's

portion unless she married her cousin. As the affair seemed to be taking a serious turn, Holmstein promised, if called upon, to be arbiter in the matter, and to enforce his decision if necessary; and upon the other parties assenting to this proposition, the meeting broke up.

Shortly afterwards, Helga was united to Hiorleif, and, as might be naturally expected, a deadly feud arose between the families of the rivals. Hostilities were commenced by the rejected suitor, who, attended by Holmstein, manned six ships and went in pursuit of Hiorleif. The latter was proceeding peaceably on a voyage, with only three unarmed vessels, when he was unexpectedly attacked, and, but for the timely interposition of some friends who fell in with him, he must have succumbed to the superior number of his foes. The new comers not only prevented the bridegroom from falling into the hands of his exasperated rival, but so far turned the scales in the conflict as to put to flight the aggressors, after slaying their leader.

Maddened by this defeat, and by the death of his brother, Holmstein determined on bringing the quarrel to an issue by attacking the other party at his own dwelling. The brothers-in-law, however, got scent of his intentions, and prepared themselves for resistance; and, consequently, the issue of this second enterprise ended as fatally to the aggressor as the first. His followers were repulsed, and he himself was left dead on the field. The surviving brother had abstained as yet from interference, and to him now, Hiorleif and Ingolf referred the arbitration of this dispute. His decision was, that Herstein had deservedly met with death for his treacherous attack, but he considered that his second brother was justified in revenging the death of the first, and for killing him he adjudged Ingolf and Hiorleif to leave Norway. They at once submitted, not so much through fear of Hallstein, as from the apprehension that Harold Haafagre might interfere, and be less lenient in his judgment. Accord-

ingly, after turning their landed and other property into money, they sailed for Iceland without their families. The two exiles first landed there in 870; and, having made all necessary arrangements, they returned at the end of four years, and carried away from Norway their wives, families, and property. When in sight of land Ingolf threw overboard the doorposts of his late Norwegian dwelling, in compliance with a custom which appears to have prevailed at that period. The settlers noticed in the Sagas, are frequently recorded to have selected for their future residence, the spot upon which their Penates were washed ashore. Though Ingolf-hofda, the most southern extremity of the land, was the first point made, the posts having floated away in a westerly direction, Ingolf steered the same course, and after a tedious search of three years, discovered them at the place now called Reikiavik, where he finally fixed his habitation.

Hiorleif following the example of his friend,

as regarded his choice of a location, settled at Hiorleif-hofda, and constructed there, two considerable edifices, in which he spent the short remaining period of his life. At the end of the first year's settlement, while sowing the land about his house, he was murdered by some Irishmen, his slaves, whom he had threatened with punishment for destroying his horse. These men, after putting his adherents as well as himself to death, fled with the wives of the slain to some small isles which lie to the south of Iceland, and have thence been called Westmanna Eyar, Westman being the name used by the Norwegians, to distinguish the inhabitants of the British isles from the people who bordered on the Baltic. The news of the massacre soon reached Ingolf, and the delinquents, after a smart pursuit, were to a man destroyed by him.

The first settlers found the country so completely covered with woods, that they were obliged to cut their way through them with

axes, and clear the ground intended for tillage, in the same way as is now practised in North America. The height of the trees is not mentioned, but they must have far surpassed those of the present day; as any thing that now bears the name of a forest, in Iceland, would offer but little impediment to the traveller. The stunted birch near Efstadal, is more like copse than timber, and I have been informed will not grow to the height of three or four feet in less than forty years. Yet the great quantities of turf every where to be met with, and the account of Hiorleif's sowing grain, would argue that in earlier ages, the climate was more genial than at present.

Though Ingolf found no inhabitants, it is certain that some mariners had touched there, probably without making a long stay; for crosses and other symbols of the Christian religion, were found in the south. The owners of these articles are supposed to have been Irish fishermen who were already converted, and were

called by heathen Norwegians, "Papæ." This fact is the only one that would plead for the truth of the assertion of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who relates that King Arthur subdued Iceland. This event is stated to have taken place in the year 516; and in another book of travels, probably equally veracious, a British king named Malgo, is said to have recovered Iceland, which it asserts had been before reduced by Arthur. Both these accounts are so clearly fabulous, as hardly to call for refutation. The Icelandic Sagas are explicit in their relation of the time and manner of the colonisation of the island, and very soon after the arrival of the first settlers, a book called "Landnamma Bok" was drawn up, which contained every particular that regarded the original proprietors of the soil.

For the first fifty years after Ingolf's arrival the distance between the different families was such, as to make each an independent community; nor was it till the close of that period that the want was felt of a bond of union and

of national institutions. Their settlements were not formed in towns: their mode of living would not have admitted of that way of locating themselves. Relying for sustenance in this new land on the produce of the earth, each man fixed on a spot removed from his neighbour, and the apparent richness of the soil, or the advantages of contiguous rivers and springs were the principal inducements in the choice of a home.

From the account of Arngrim Jonas, in his "Crymogœa," the way of living was in many respects the same in the first era of the island as among their descendants of the present day. Their houses were built either of sods alone, or of alternate layers of stone and turf. This mode was adopted as calculated to exclude external frost more effectually than timber. The windows were more generally placed in the roof than the walls; and the roof itself was covered with earth, and yearly clothed in grass. The timber used in the construction of the

beams, rafters, and other woodwork, was either of native growth, or washed on shore by the tide. The farm offices were separate, though contiguous to the dwelling-house, the stables formed an outer circle to the mass of building, and the general stores were placed in isolated spots for fear of fire.

Though the greater number of houses were of a very humble description, in many cases a rude magnificence was exhibited in fitting up the interior; mention is made of ceilings and panels carved with representations of historical events, and in size some of the mansions of the richer people were by no means inconsiderable, if we are to judge by the account of the houses of Hiorleif and others. The ground around the house was generally enclosed, and reserved for pasture.

Their customary drink was whey, and they added to it a kind of porridge rendered more palatable by the admixture of honey, and the juice of small blue berries. With the use

of malt liquors, they were not unacquainted, from their continual intercourse with Europe. After enumerating the above articles, which, with fish and mutton, formed their whole diet, Arngrim states his conviction that if his early countrymen were not addicted to luxury or gluttony, their temperance is not to be attributed to their inability to indulge in these vices, but to their judgment and innate good qualities. He declares that there was no deficiency of entertainments among them, nor were these wanting in splendour, either as regards the number of the guests, or the length of time the feasts lasted. Thorar and Thoralder, two brothers in the north, entertained at their father's funeral 1200 men for fourteen days, of whom none departed without presents. Another instance of the same ostentatious liberality is given by him in the case of Olavr Pà, an inhabitant of the western province, who, with his two brothers, feasted nine hundred for a fortnight. Both these banquets were given at the

private expense of individuals, and without producing any inconvenient effects on the fortunes of the donors.

On common occasions, the dress of the ancient Icelanders was of native manufacture of wool, spun and woven by their wives and slaves. The richer class sometimes added a coat or cloak of foreign cloth; the linen for the dress of the women was imported, though, as Arngrim remarks, it was unadorned with the bright colours which were prevalent in his own days. At a later period, he continues, when the age had degenerated from the ancient frugality which characterizes the early inhabitants, it was found necessary to pass a sumptuary law with regard to dress, and to restrain the passion for inordinate display, which was making rapid progress through the land.

There is no appearance of their having made use of coins: the general practice of bartering goods made it unnecessary to have recourse to money in their commercial transactions. Silver,

however, was common, and its value reckoned by its weight; rings also and bracelets were employed, chiefly as remembrances from superiors to private individuals, and from friend to friend.

In exercises and amusements, the present generation is, no doubt, very inferior to their forefathers. In former times, before poverty had struck them, various were the sports which kept up the spirit of their youth and developed the powers of the body. Among them was wrestling, perhaps the only one which has lasted to the present day. They had also hurling-matches, and archery; and slinging was not neglected; but the most exciting amusement was the "hestaweg," in which the parties contended on horseback; wounds and even death frequently occurred in this pastime; and when foul play was suspected, it was not uncommon for them to fight in earnest, and for the majority to leave their lives in the field.

CHAPTER III.

INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

A code of laws introduced—The form of government—adopted—The Hrepp—The Thing—Religious ceremonies—Human sacrifices—The courts—The Laugmadr — Althing — Laws — Ordeal — Exposition of Infants — Berserkir — Discovery of Greenland — Of America—Introduction of Christianity.

About fifty-six years after Ingolf's arrival, the population had so much increased that it was considered necessary to form a regular government. In 928, Ufliot, who had two years before brought over a book of Norwegian laws,

proposed that a selection should be made of such statutes as were applicable to their infant colony. At a public meeting "Thorlief, hin spake," or "the wise," was requested to compile a code, with the assistance of some other chiefs; he complied with the demand, and gleaned from the Norwegian laws whatever he judged to be serviceable to Iceland.

The new form of government given to the country was that of an aristocratic republic. The island was divided into four provinces, called after the cardinal points of the compass. These were again subdivided, each into three districts, with the exception of the northern province, which, on account of its superior size, was divided into four parts. These were again subdivided into portions called "Hreppar," a term which in many respects is analogous to our hundred; ten of them were generally contained in one district, though the number varied.

The Hrepp was inhabited by at least ten

farmers, each in possession of a fixed value of property. In each of the districts was a court of justice called "Thing," which was also consecrated to religious uses, and was built with considerable magnificence for the country it was in. Two of these edifices were 120 feet long, the one in Wassdall in the northern province, the other at Kialarnes in the southern, and the latter was also sixty feet in breadth.—Attached to each "Thing," was a temple which was considered most sacred, and contained the statues of their gods, elevated on pedestals and surrounded with sheep reserved for sacrifice. Thor, the principal idol, occupied the centre, and was supported on either side by Freyer, Niordr, and As, and many inferior deities, whose numbers are uncertain; as, however, the names of the three last only occur in the ancient form of oath, it is probable that As, who is supposed to be Odin, and his two children Freyer and Niordr, were the only gods in much consideration. Before the pedestal of the chief figure

stood an altar called "wiigdann," covered with iron, on which a fire was kept burning; in the centre of it a large caldron of bronze received the blood of the victims, and served for sprinkling the bystanders. A silver ring of the weight of twenty ounces, lay on the altar, for persons to hold while taking an oath, after it had been dipped in the blood in the caldron.

The victims in general were quadrupeds, though the priests did not consider that their gods could be propitiated at so easy a rate; at Kialarnes, human beings were the peace-offerings which were presented to their idols. The unfortunate sufferers were plunged headlong into a deep well, called the "blodkelda," that was dug before the doors of the temple. In Thornes Thing, in Westland a different, but equally horrible, mode of sacrifice was adopted: the human victims were dashed to pieces against a large stone that stood in the middle of the court. After the abolition of heathen rites such a horror was felt at these acts of barbarity, that

the stone was said to have retained the colour of blood though washed by the rain of many centuries.

This abominable practice does not appear to have lasted long in Iceland, or to have prevailed in any places except those just named; neither were these acts approved of by the majority. From the first, many of the settlers, though brought up in heathenism in Norway, showed a decided aversion to the worship of idols; and one went so far as to burn down a temple at Esiuberg, and destroy all the idols that were in it; an act that was resented by the pagans, whose first work was to rebuild the scene of their iniquities.

To return to the division of the country under its new constitution, the "Hrepps," were under the care of officers called Hreppstiores, whose qualifications were reputed integrity and possessoin of immovable property. They had the charge of the poor, and it was their duty not only to relieve the indigent, but to guard against

others falling into the like difficulties. In order to effect this, not only very severe laws were enacted against persons who attempted to get themselves supported by the labours of the industrious part of the community; but as a further preventive against pauperism, the settlement of a new comer in a Hrepp required the sanction of its inhabitants, who might reject a person likely to be a burden to the society, or convicted of a crime. Losses by fire were ascertained by an inquisition, and half the damage incurred by the sufferer made good to him by a levy on the inhabitants of the Hrepp. In like manner a man, who lost a fourth of his flock by pestilence, had the same relief extended to him; but in neither case was this claim allowed to be repeated more than three times, nor was the loss of treasure compensated for at all.

An inferior court was held by the Hreppstiore to which the people were summoned by the hammer of Thor being sent round by each to his nearest neighbour; a symbol which, after the

introduction of Christianity, was changed for a wooden cross. The magistrate immediately above them, who presided over the thirteen districts, also made use of emblems to announce extraordinary meetings. They varied according to the nature of the business to be transacted; such as a spear when an inquest was to be held on a dead body; or a wooden axe, when the taxes were to be collected; and they were known by the general name of "bod," or summons.

The superior magistrate was called Laug-madr, or law-man; and it was his duty to enforce and interpret the laws, and to preside also at the general court of the whole island, called the Althing. At first it was held at Armansfell, in the south, and was after a time removed to Thing-valla, where it continued till the year 1800. During Iceland's independence this species of parliament—for it not only employed itself in the decision of grave cases, reserved for its consideration, but also in the

enactment of new laws—met yearly about the middle of May, and continued its deliberations for fourteen days. No building was used on the occasion, and people, who flocked from all quarters, merely pitched their tents on the banks of the Oxeraa, and carried on their discussions in the open air. The meeting of the Althing was also the time when capital punishments were inflicted on delinquents; the men being decapitated on a small island in the river, and the women drowned in a deep pool close by, after an hour's exposure to the view of the assembled multitude. The latter peculiar punishment seems to have been general among the northern nations, as we find in Tacitus, that death was inflicted on cowards in Germany, by drowning them with a hurdle over the head.

The form of government was essentially aristocratic in all its details, and in many respects resembled that of the Saxons. The laws, which in some cases, particularly such as regarded the chastity of women, were very severe, allowed

murder to be compensated for by a fine payable to the relatives of the deceased; thus, while adultery was visited with death, one, or at most three hundred ounces of silver were considered an equivalent for the life of a freeman.

In cases where there was not sufficient evidence to convict a suspected person of a crime, a kind of ordeal was resorted to, which, though not as terrible as that by fire among our ancestors, was equally absurd. It consisted in the prisoners passing under a strip of turf, placed in the form of an arch, without any prop to keep it in that position. If the turf remained unmoved during his transit, his evidence in his own favour was credited; but did it fall in, his guilt was considered substantiated, and his doom was irrevocably fixed. In making a solemn agreement, a similar ceremony took place; the contracting parties stood under the turf, which in this case was supported by a spear, and mingled together a quantity of blood drawn from the bodies of each, and by

this act bound themselves, besides assisting their companions during life, in case of surviving them, to do their utmost to revenge their deaths.

Many other barbarous customs are frequently noticed in the Sagas, which had evidently been brought over from Norway, and ceased to exist when the mild spirit of Christianity was diffused among them. Of these none was perhaps more horrible than the practice of destroying their children, when the inconvenience of bringing them up, or the whim of the moment, tempted a father to reject his offspring. An instance of this custom is to be found in the Landnama bok, which, though partly fabulous, gives us a notion of what common occurrence it must have been. Thoracta having been delivered of a child, her husband, Asgrim, without any further remark, ordered it to be killed; while the slave, who was to execute his command, was digging a hole for its grave, the child, says the legend, who was

lying on the floor, sung the following lines to him :

"Làttit mic til mòder
Mèr er kalt à gòlfi
Hvar man svennin sœmri
En a sins fòdurs aimum
Tharf eigi jàrn at eggia,
Ne jardarmen skerda ;
Lettit leoto verki.
Lifa man ek med mannon."—*Land* v. *cap.* 6.

"Take me to my mother! I am cold upon the floor! where is a boy more seemly than in his father's arms? You need not sharpen steel, or cut up the turf; leave your loathsome work; it is fate for me to live among men."

The appeal was not, it appears, fruitless, for the boy was taken up by his father, and in the sequel became a distingished hero.

Another feature which brutalized many of their principal warriors was that of habituating themselves to give way to passion, till it became a disease over which they had no control. On

such occasions they were like maniacs in the highest state of phrensy; their force was irresistible, and they slew alike friend and foe. Stripping themselves to the skin, they would attack armed men, and seize their weapons with their teeth; but on the passing away of the fit, this supernatural strength was followed by a languor that placed them completely at the mercy of the merest child. This class of persons at one time was numerous, and known by the name of Berserkir; they, however, gradually disappeared after the eleventh century, when society would no longer tolerate their outrages.

Such were the manners of this people nearly a thousand years ago; manners from which they have changed but in a trifling degree, and to which they cling as much as is in their power. The principal difference in the country, at the former and present period, consists in the number of powerful men in the old times; whereas now an almost perfect equality of rank

and fortune reigns throughout. This, perhaps, may be explained by the number of Thrœl or slaves that they owned, the possession of whom obviated the necessity of the freemen tilling the land themselves, and gave them the opportunity of attending to other pursuits. Commerce, in particular, occupied many of them, and that considerable energy was displayed in their maritime affairs is apparent by the discovery that they made, at the close of the twelfth century, of two countries at that time unknown to the rest of the world.

Erick Raude, in 982, discovered Greenland, and left there some of his people, who formed a settlement of considerable extent; for his son Hans was sent by Olaus Tryggeser, King of Norway to convert the inhabitants. The colony was afterwards formed into a diocese, and besides three monasteries, contained twelve parish churches, and two hundred and ninety villages. This flourishing state of things

continued till 1466, when the last bishop was sent over; from that time the ice began to collect along the eastern coast to such an extent that no ships have been since able to approach it, and the fate of the whole colony has remained a mystery to this day.

The second discovery to which the Icelanders lay claim, is no less than that of North America. A few years after the discovery of Greenland, one Biorn Heriolson was driven westward, on a voyage to that land, and proceeding in a south-westerly direction, reached a country to which he gave the name of Vinland from the wild grapes which he found there. Several other mariners went there afterwards, the last of whom, after a stay of three years, was killed by the natives, who were known to the Icelanders by the name of Skrœlinger.

Finnur Johnson, Bishop of Skàlholt, is of opinion, in his Ecclesiastical History, that this country must either have been Virginia itself, or in the same latitude, for the shortest winter

days were about nine hours long, and the productions of the earth such as belong to that country. Another passage, which seems to refers to America, is to be found in the Landnama Bok, where Air is mentioned to have sailed to Vinland, that lies in the Western Ocean, six days' sail from Ireland. Both these accounts appear improbable; yet no great difficulty was to be encountered by these islanders in reaching America, as they were already half way across the ocean.

About the same time as these discoveries, a change took place in Iceland by the introduction of Christianity, which was begun in 982, and completed within eighteen years of that date. It was originally owing to one Thoralder, who brought over a Saxon named Frederic; after preaching for four years with little success they retired to Constantinople, and left the work to be completed by Olaus, king of Norway. This prince, elated with his success in converting his own subjects, and the inhabi-

tants of the Feroe isles, sent over several missionaries, and wrought a considerable change in the people.

The new religion preached among them had called the attention of all to it, and as opinions were much divided on the subject, it was resolved that the discussion should be referred to the Althing at its next meeting. The missionaries of Olaus were allowed to plead in favour of their tenets, but while yet speaking, were interrupted by the news that the Yokuls, to the east of Thingvalle, were in a state of eruption, and had already covered the surrounding country with flames and destruction. This event was considered as a judgment of the higher powers, and the Pagans at once exclaimed, that it was no wonder that the indignation of their gods was excited by the new religion which it was attempted to introduce. But they were quickly answered by Snorro Godi, a priest, who retorted by asking them what had called down the anger of the gods when the very rock upon

which they stood, had been reduced to a molten mass by subterraneous fire?

The sight of the surrounding scenery, where every thing that is terrible and sublime are combined, the tremenduous effects of volcanic fire which appeared on every side, and lastly the reflection that this eruption had taken place prior to the arrival of Ingolf, had an immediate effect on the assembly.

At the same time the eloquence of the Laugmadr Thorgeir, who vigorously advocated the cause of Christianity, came to its support, and turned the tide in favour of the proposed change.

Fifty six years after, Isleif, the son of one of the missionaries, was appointed bishop of Skàlholt, and having journeyed to Rome, was duly consecrated by the Pope. In 1106 the want of a second bishop being felt, Holum, in the northern province, was erected into an episcopal see.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MISFORTUNES OF ICELAND.

Early attempts of the Kings of Norway to gain possession of Iceland—The voluntary surrendering of the island—The consequences of it—Saarti Daudi—Eruptions—The Reformation—The last great volcanic eruption in 1783—Jorgensen's revolution in 1809.

THE eleventh and twelfth centuries passed over Iceland without producing much change either in its government or the manners of its inhabitants. Men of learning, at least for those ages, contributed to acquire for these islanders

a reputation in the north of Europe, which has not even yet altogether passed away. Added to this they were so famous for their poetry, that they were always welcome guests at the court of Norway and Sweden, where it was believed that there was a kind of magic hidden in their verses, whereby they could summon the demons from the infernal regions. Gradually the aristocratic kind of government under which they had thrived degenerated into the worst species of oligarchy, and dissension took the place of order and quiet. A few powerful men aspired to the supreme command; the laws fell into contempt; and violence, rapine and sedition kindled a civil war among them. Such errors can seldom be committed without punishment and that incurred by Iceland was great, for it amounted to no less than the loss of its independence.

Not long after the departure of the first fugitives, Harold Haarfagre perceived the inconvenience of an independant people rising up

from among his subjects; he therefore attempted to check the emigration, by imposing a fine upon all who quitted Norway with that intention. Failing in this, he had recourse to more violent measures, and determined on making himself master of the island. To accomplish this he brought into his views Uni, the son of Gardar, above mentioned, and promised him the hereditary government of Iceland if he should succeed in gaining possession of it. The Swede agreed to take the command of the enterprise, and considering that stratagem would be more likely to prevail than open violence, took only twelve men, and put on the mask of friendship, intending to assassinate the chieftains, and gradually make a diversion in his own favour. He landed on the southern coast and mixed with the inhabitants; but failing to prevent suspicions of his conduct, they put him and his comrades to death, before he had had time to enter upon the execution of his plans.

The thoughts of Saint Olaus were too much taken up with their spiritual condition, to give him time to militate against their political interests; but his successor, Olaus the Fat, also surnamed the Holy, from some miracles attributed to him, followed up the intentions of Harold. Avoiding the errors of that king, he tried milder measures, and sent over ambassadors with presents, proposing to the Icelanders that they should acknowledge his superiority, and rely on him for assistance. This after being rejected, he begged of them to give up to him a small island on the northern coast, called Grimsey. They were on the point of falling into the snare laid for them, but were prevented by Einar of Threera, who remonstrated on the folly of complying with the king's request, and showed them the dangerous consequences of such a concession. Exasperated at this second repulse, Olaus imprisoned the Icelanders whom he had at his court, and was meditating on proceeding to still further lengths, when his life, as

well as his iniquitous designs, were put an end to by intestine seditions.

Similar, though not such open, agressions were made by his half-brother, Harold the Cruel, which met with no better success; the country, however, by the middle of the thirteenth century, had been reduced to the state that is adverted to in the beginning of the chapter. Owing to these deplorable disorders, the king of Norway, Hagen, gained what his predecessors had so much thirsted after: for it became apparent to the natives, that no more expeditious or certain way was to be found of restoring public tranquillity, than by subjecting the aristocracy, as well as the people, to a power able to coerce and punish their intemperance. Three of the provinces, therefore, agreed, in 1261, to recognise the king of Norway upon certain conditions; and the eastern part, which at first resisted the proposition, gave its consent three years later.

By the conditions of cession it was stipulated,

that the ancient laws should remain in force. The Icelanders were to be on a footing with the Norwegians, and, furthermore, were not to be bound by any oath of allegiance to the king, unless their privileges were maintained inviolate. The act of surrendering had the desired effect: tranquillity was restored, the laws were again put in force, and the evils which had overwhelmed the country disappeared. The change was, nevertheless, dearly bought: with their independence disappeared a great portion of the enterprise that had marked the character of their ancestors. Being no longer called upon to attend themselves to their national welfare, their energies became palsied; they returned to a state of pupilage, and instead of directing their affairs, their only duty became obedience to those set over them, and reliance on the exertions of others in their behalf. Forming an insignificant province, though never treated with tyranny, they were often neglected: from this period, therefore, their history is a mere blank—

chequered, unfortunately, but too often with calamities brought on by their climate and the volcanic nature of their soil.

The century that immediately followed the loss of their independence was particularly memorable for these visitations. In the course of the first forty years no less than six series of eruptions destroyed their cattle, swept away their habitations, and rendered a great part of the land, hitherto useful, unavailable for pasture; and when, in 1387, by the crown of Norway coming into the hands of Margaret, the Semiramis of the North, Iceland became part of the Danish dominions, the change of masters brought no change of condition with it to the country. The reign of the new dynasty was ushered in by the appearance of a pestilence so deadly as to obtain for it the name of "Suarti Daudi," or Black Death. Before its ravages had subsided, two-thirds of the inhabitants had fallen victims to its virulence, leaving their survivors to feel the following year the additional

misery of famine, as the disease that had before attacked human beings transferred itself to the cattle, and carried the greater part away.

It is not to be wondered at, that in the midst of such a complication of evils, this unfortunate people sunk rapidly, and that the learning for which it had been remarkable, disappeared from among them; it is rather astonishing, that overwhelmed as they were on every side (for in addition to other miseries their coasts were at this time infested with English and Irish pirates), they bore up and preserved those few remnants of literature which after the Reformation were partially revived. The very tone of their writers partakes of the gloominess which pervaded their country; and the simple recital of their woes is made in the words of men whose spirit is broken down, and who have been so long accustomed to misfortune as to despair of any change for the better.

The Reformation which was spreading in the north of Europe found its way to Iceland;

not, however, without bringing with it troubles and dissensions. The two bishops of Holum and Skàlholt taking different sides, these two prelates commenced hostilities against each other, which ended in the beheading the one who adhered to the Pope, and in the adoption of the Lutheran creed, which is to this day the only one known in the land. A new spring was also given to learning by the foundation of two schools at the sees of the bishops, which owed their origin to Christian III. Both were afterwards united, and are at present represented by the school of Bessestad.

The reader must be wearied with the recapitulation of horrors which follow close on one another, without one incident to dissipate the gloom that covers the whole narration; and it is a relief to approach near to our own time, and feel that the recapitulation is coming to a close. The last century, however, seems to have concentrated the horrors of all the preceding ones; and has, perhaps, been altogether the most

terrible that has passed over Iceland. In 1707 the smallpox found its way into the island, and, out of a population of 47,000, swept 16,000 into the grave in one year! In 1759, after a succession of inclement years, the almost entire loss of their cattle brought on a famine, and another gap was made in the numbers of the people, who were barely recovered from their last scourge. Starvation succeeded disease, and 10,000 fell victims to this second visitation. The third and greatest calamity, was the unparalleled eruption of several volcanoes in 1783. The waters of the river Skaptaa were suddenly dried up, and a torrent of liquid fire rolled in their stead. This was followed soon after by other streams of lava, that came down with such rapidity as to drive the inhabitants from their houses: frequent earthquakes were felt; and a phenomenon, not before witnessed in such cases, appeared in the form of a dense cloud, that covered the whole island, and involved it in total darkness. The consequences

were terrible; the air became infected: the ground covered with volcanic ashes, produced grass that poisoned the cattle that fed on it. The inhabitants of the country near Skaptaa Jokul were attacked with an epidemic of a putrid nature; the loss of cattle brought on a famine; and, to crown the whole, the smallpox made its appearance a second time. Assistance was sent them from Denmark, and every attempt was made to arrest the ravages of the disease; but all that could be devised could not prevent one quarter of the population being carried off by this complication of ills.

Since that period no physical revolution has disturbed the tranquillity of Iceland; the volcanoes have ceased from their labours, and, with the exception of one that emitted smoke about six or seven years ago, have remained in a quiescent state.

Little more remains to be told; and were it not for a laughable occurrence that took place in 1809, this brief sketch might close here; as,

however, the melancholy greatly preponderates over the ludicrous in every thing that regards this country, it would be unfair to omit any thing that has a portion of the latter in it. In the month of January, in the above-mentioned year, the people of Reikiavik were struck with the unexpected arrival of a ship in the depth of winter. On entering the harbour she hoisted American colours, the United States being neutral; but, upon a representation being made that no foreign vessel was allowed to trade with the island, the captain hoisted the English flag, and declared himself an enemy. It proved to be a ship from London, sent by a Mr. Phelps, an extensive soap-boiler, on the representation of one Jorgensen that tallow, then a scarce article in England, was to be procured in Iceland on very advantageous terms.

This Jorgen Jorgensen was a prisoner of war, who had originally begun life in an English collier, and subsequently served as midshipman in a British man-of-war. Upon the breaking

out of the war with Denmark, he returned to his native country, and took the command of a privateer, but had the ill-luck, in the early part of his new career, to be captured by the Swan frigate. While on parole in London, he met with Phelps, and represented the advantage of entering upon the Icelandic trade while the Danes were excluded from it by the British cruisers that hovered about the entrance of the Cattegat. The soap-boiler was tempted by what he heard, and dispatched his new acquaintance with a cargo, and with him sent a half-French, half-English sort of character, named Savignac, as supercargo, to whose bad conduct much of the evil that followed has been attributed.

Upon their arrival, the governor interdicted all dealings with the English, and Jorgensen, finding it of no use to attempt any at that time, discharged his cargo, and returned in ballast, leaving Savignac behind him. Phelps was not discouraged by this misfortune, but pro-

ceeded to fit out another vessel, called the Margaret and Anne, and provided himself with with a letter of marque. He determined on going himself this time, and set sail with twelve guns prepared for hostilities, should they suit his views. On his arrival he seized a Danish vessel, called the Orion, in virtue of a letter of marque. Savignac, also, gave his employer to understand that the governor had offered a reward for Mr. Phelps's head. Upon hearing this, the merchant ordered his captain to seize the person of the governor, who was accordingly arrested on a Sunday afternoon, as the people were coming from church, and put on board the Margaret and Anne, where he was kept in strict confinement.

Jorgensen, who had hitherto been quiet, now came forward, and seized upon the reins of government. He began by issuing a proclamation, by which he declared Iceland an independent republic, to be placed under the protection of Great Britain, and decided upon three

white stockfish upon a blue ground for its flag. He also undertook to put the country in a state of defence, and to restore the ancient form of government; but as these changes would require some time to effect, he took upon himself the labour of ruling the land, until such time as the constitution should be sufficiently established to work without his aid; and he satisfied himself with taking the modest titles of Protector of Iceland and Commander by Sea and Land.

As he felt the utility of pecuniary resources, he declared all the property belonging to Danes forfeited to the state; and in order to render himself popular with the natives, he sold them the grain belonging to the former at half price. Among other means that he took to turn the trade into the hands of his employers, and to prevent any attempt at resistance, he ordered all the Danes to give up their arms, and forbad them, under pain of instant death, to stir out of their houses. Backed by the guns of

the Margaret and Anne, which could blow up the town and its inhabitants in less than half an hour, Jorgensen was too formidable to be resisted by the Danes, who were, besides, dispirited by the loss of their governor, and he quietly took possession and installed himself in the dwelling of the latter.

Having now formed a body-guard, from some thieves that he picked up and rigged out as soldiers, he set about his changes, turning out one magistrate, imprisoning another, and plundering Danes wherever he had an opportunity. To redeem his promise of putting the island in a state of defence, he caused six rusty guns to be dragged from Bessestad, where they had lain for near two hundred years, and with them mounted a battery for the protection of the town. The wool that was purchased by Phelps during the summer, was put up in bales so as to form a breastwork, and as military an appearance as possible was given to the whole.

It is uncertain how far he would have carried

his plans into execution, had he met with no foreign obstacle. It has been said that he was backed by some influential Icelanders, who preferred the English to the Danish government, and, no doubt, the prudence of many of his orders indicate, that he was directed by persons who were well acquainted with every detail relative to the country. The people, however, were too dispersed and too unaccustomed to agitation to take a warm part in the revolution, and Jorgensen was too regardless of private rights not to make many enemies. Though he must have fallen of himself, his usurpation was put an end to by a much more powerful engine.

While he was playing the dictator at Reikiavik, and amusing himself with tormenting the Danes, the Talbot sloop of war, under the command of the Honourable Alexander Jones, entered the port of Havnifiord, and received information of what was going on at the capital: the captain immediately went there, and seeing the new flag waving over the town,

ordered it to be taken down, and the Danish colours substituted. The battery, too, was destroyed. The governor having desired to be taken to England, to represent what had happened to the English government, Captain Jones appointed the two next officers in rank, named Stephenson, to govern in his absence.

As for Jorgensen, the captain insisted upon his going to England, as he had broken his parole. The Margaret and Anne sailed with the best cargo that ever left Iceland: but, before she lost sight of land, she was discovered to be on fire; and the crew were only rescued by Jorgensen coming up to them in the prize Orion. The fire was attributed to the Danish prisoners; but, there is every reason to believe that it arose from the wool, that had been used for the battery, having been put on board wet, and consequently ignited. Jorgensen, on his return, was put in confinement, and having committed two felonies, was transported to

Botany Bay: and Phelps, unable to recover the loss of his ship, became a bankrupt.

Thus ended this singular business: and after the departure of the Talbot, the affairs of the isle again took their usual course, and no evil consequences arose from this attempted revolution, except the losses by a few individuals who had been plundered under the plea of "Universal Good." Since that time the people, who were subject to many privations during the war, have been reaping the advantages of peace, and have been blessed with milder seasons than had been usual. The consequence has been increase of comforts throughout the land; and it is to be hoped that their present improved condition may not make them neglectful, or forget that such visitations, as have been here enumerated, may occur again, and overwhelm them with even greater misery.

CHAPTER V.

Winter in Reikiavik—Living among the natives—Town of Reikiavik.

THE departure of the corvette left me alone to look about me, and make my arrangements for the winter. The chief disadvantage that I laboured under was my ignorance of both Danish and Icelandic, both of which are spoken in Reikiavik, and I soon found that English, with one or two exceptions, was unknown. My only plan was, therefore, to make myself as quickly as possible acquainted with Danish,

which I understood was by far the easiest of the two tongues; and with this view I took my meals with a Sysselman of a neighbouring district, who was obliged to remain at Reikiavik during the winter. My new messmate was a clever lively man, possibly well imbued with a sense of the dignity of a Sysselman, and desirous that others might have the same feeling, but on the whole an entertaining companion. Our conversation was at first carried on in Latin, and from daily exercise we soon lost the difficulty we felt in expressing ourselves. Some embarrassment was also occasioned by our different pronunciation, the Icelanders adopting that of the Italians. It was not long, however, before we left off the learned language, and, by mutual consent, exchanged it for the Danish, to which we both stuck during the remainder of our acquaintance.

It will be easily believed that our meals exhibited no great luxury, either as regarded the materials or the cooking; yet on the whole,

for the two first months our fare was as good as might be expected in any other part of the North of Europe. As the winter, however, advanced, a great falling off in the victualling department took place. Fresh meat gradually disappeared; smoked mutton, that raised blisters on the tongue, was substituted; and the daily repetition of cod-fish, without any sauce but the water it was boiled in, gave a very insipid character to our ordinary dinner. Occasionally, salt salmon, or a piece of veal, from a calf slaughtered a few hours after its birth, was added; but in general such delicacies were reserved for high days.

Even this was far superior to the ordinary living of the natives; their diet, of course, may be supposed to correspond with the poverty of their dwellings and the general simplicity of their lives. Dried cod-fish, prepared without salt, is the principal article of subsistence of the mass of the people; it, in fact, is the substitute for bread, which they seldom taste, and is

eaten raw, with butter spread upon it, after undergoing a sufficient pounding with a heavy stone mallet, to shiver it into thin shreds. In this state it is, by no means, unpalatable by itself; and, were fresh or salted substituted for the rancid butter which is always used, there would be nothing to object to this kind of food.

Their preference to stale over salted butter one must attribute to salt being an imported article, and a luxury to be attained, in the interior, only by a few. However this may be, salt is very little used even in the preservation of their meat, the mutton being always smoked for winter, and the fish merely split and dried in the sun. Though bread itself is not eaten out of Reikiavik, rye gruel, forms one meal in the day, and flat cakes of the same grain are occasionally to be met with. Windmills are scarce; probably the two best are at Kieblivik and Reikiavik, and as water power is nowhere resorted to, though the waterfalls and rapids every where offer great hydraulic advantages,

the farmers are contented to stick to the primitive mode of grinding their corn in handmills, called by them "quern," though the labour and time expended in the process is far greater, and, after all, inadequately performed.

The little use of vegetables made by the Icelanders, and the necessity they labour under of confining themselves to animal food, produces many cutaneous diseases, that, from neglect in the first instance, often become very terrible in their consequences. The few vegetables that they use are at best but stunted pigmies of their kind, and are besides very scarce, seeds seldom finding their way into the interior from the ports. The almost only native vegetable dish that they indulge in, is a sort of gruel prepared from the lichen called "Fiall grass," or mountain grass (*Lichen Icelandicus*), that in some respects resembles the dandelion, having brownish-green leaves, with jagged edges. It is found in great plenty in the valleys, and as it abounds in mucilage, it is made into a very palatable soup

by the addition of cream and sugar, after being boiled in several waters, to extract its bitterness.

But the article of food that is most prized, is the flesh of the "Haukall," a species of dog-fish or shark, that abounds on the coast of Iceland. Before it is fit for use it must have been buried for a couple of years in the sand; when arrived at a state of maturity by this inhumation, it is said to resemble pork in flavour, but is so offensive as to render it impossible to approach a person who has tasted the least morsel of it for three weeks before. This, however, is not considered a sufficient reason for rejecting it, and I may say that, on the whole, they display as great a love of *haut gout* as any aldermanic epicure; whether reindeer's meat or skait engross their attention, a few weeks' wind-drying is all that is considered necessary to either. If it were not ill-natured, they might also be accused of eating horseflesh, though it is but justice to say that the preference shown to the

latter food is confined to certain places, and has gained for these persons the name of "Hross eiter," or horse eaters, which is looked upon as a term of special reproach.

Our mess, however, was never reduced to such extremities, though for a time we were deprived even of potatoes, which did not make their reappearance at our table till the arrival of a postship. Five or six times during the winter a bullock was brought to the town, and bought by one or other of the merchants, who sent a notice of this extraordinary occurrence round the place, that each might write down what quantity he wished to have reserved for him. The beef was generally poor, and sold at about two pence per lb.; yet even this price restricted its use to the wealthier inhabitants. The mutton, however, is proverbially good, and, till October, very fat; after that period it is not in general eaten fresh, as the sheep fall off in weight, and a sufficient quantity are slaughtered to last them out the winter.

Reindeer are plentiful but very inaccessible, keeping in the mountains, and only descending into the valleys when driven by starvation; the few therefore that are shot, principally in the neighbourhood of Thingvalle Vatn, are so reduced by hunger as to render them hardly worth the chase. Unlike their brothers in Lapland, they have never been put to any use, and since their introduction from Finmark, about sixty years ago, have multiplied wonderfully; for though now to be seen at times in herds of a hundred together, this stock was derived from only three individuals, the survivors of thirteen that the king sent over.

Ptarmigans are far easier got at, and their abundance may be imagined, when eleven hundred are sometimes caught by one man from December to March. They are occasionally shot; but the best, as well as most expeditious mode, is to snare them in the snow, and when left to freeze many are packed up in close barrels

with their feathers on, and sent in that state to Denmark, two and three months afterwards.

During the winter about a dozen of the merchants met every evening, and continued, with the most laudable perseverance, to play from six till twelve, and often even later, at one solitary game of cards. Indeed I do not even recollect to have heard any other game but Ombre mentioned among them; the "sable Matadors" took up their undivided attention, and except to light a cigar, or drink a glass of punch, the players seldom raised their eyes off the cards, even to venture upon a remark. The only advantage that I could ever discover in the game that they had selected, and kept to with such fidelity, is that, being interminable, it could be made to last as long as their own winter nights; and, to all appearance surpassed them in dulness.

Reikiavik is of modern date; for till within half a century of the present time, it could

scarcely be called a town. The two sees of Skalholt and Holum are generally marked as such in the maps, though they consisted of only a school, beside the residences of the bishops. In each of the ports was also to be found a timber house, belonging to the king, built for the purpose of carrying on the trade of the surrounding district, and occupied by the factors and their families. Gradually a few of the poorer people, attracted by the employment which the merchants gave them during the summer in discharging the ships, as well as by the fishery, settled on these spots, and built themselves a few cottages of the most wretched description in each harbour. The rest, however, of the population, with the exception of Reikiavik, remains dispersed in single farms over the country.

The first attempt at raising a town was made by the king, Christian VII., by establishing a woollen manufactory on the site of the present capital. The trade of the port before that

time had been carried on in a small island called Ephersœ, which at low water is connected with the mainland by a reef. In consequence of the washing away of one side, and the perceptible decrease of its extent, it was considered advisable to transfer the house that stood on it to the mainland. The name of Ingolf's Havn, or Ingolf's harbour, which the port bore till this time, was now changed for Reikiavik, from the smoke of a hot spring in the plain between it and the bishop's house at Laugarnœs. The manufactory itself did not answer so well as might have been wished, and though the king sent over for several boys and girls, and caused them to be instructed in various trades, his exertions in favour of this part of his subjects was not repaid with the success they deserved, nor at this time is any article exported but in its raw state, if we except some woollen knit goods, and a small quantity of brimstone, refined in the northern province. Three or four years ago an attempt was made by an enterprising indivi-

dual to establish similar works at Krusedvik, where sulphur abounds, but after the land that produced it had been purchased, and considerable expense incurred, so little encouragement was met with, that the affair was gradually dropped.

The governor at the same time removed from Bessestad to a house at Reikiavik, now used for the meeting of the High Court, and the two schools of Holum and Skàlholt were united in one, and transferred to the same place. Since then the students have again shifted their quarters to their present house at Bessestad, the building at Reikiavik has been pulled down, and the only vestige of this defunct seat of learning is a clump of cottages built on its site, that still retain the name of Skola Bai. To render the seat of government complete, it was deemed requisite to add a prison, and accordingly the only stone house in the place was erected ; but as it was found to be not only unnecessary but to encourage vice, by affording more comfortable

quarters to criminals than many honest people could aspire to, it underwent the strange change of being converted into a residence for the governor, in whose more honourable occupation it remains to this day.

The cathedral has been built in the centre of the town in an open space called Ostervall, which in summer is generally covered with the tents of those who come to trade. It is built of hewn stone, with a wooden tower and roof, and has attached to one of its sides a sacristy, and a small room for the reception of coffins till the time for the funeral arrives. The pews, into which the lower part of the church is divided, are reserved for the women alone; as it is not customary for the men to sit in any part of the church except the chancel or gallery; and the governor has the same sort of glazed pew for attending divine service as at Bessestad. The decorations of the altar remind one of a catholic church, as also the candles that burn on it before an indifferent painting of the de-

scent from the cross, which, however, is the best specimen of the pictorial art to be met with in the country. To the left of it a railed seat is reserved for the bishop, who takes no part in the service himself, except at ordinations. On these occasions, the prelate wears over his satin rochet, a splendid stole of purple velvet covered with embroidery. The candidate is conducted to the steps of the altar by two priests in surplices, and after a long exhortation in Latin, which, I believe, is only made use of in this church ceremony, he is admitted into holy orders, the greater part of the service being chanted.

At the back of the town is a lake which communicates with the sea by a small stream, that separates the governor's house from the rest of Reikiavik. It has been suggested, that by widening this stream into a canal, the piece of water might be converted into a basin for shipping, but it is very doubtful whether the returns would repay the expense of the first

outlay, and the subsequently keeping it in a condition to be taken advantage of. In the spring, when the snow on the hills to the east and west of the town begins to thaw, the water in the lake is so much increased as not to find a ready exit by the stream, and the whole of the plain round the church is overflowed and impassable, except in boats. The timber houses are tarred over, and only one story high; nor would it be safe to build any more lofty of such slight material, from the great prevalence of gales throughout the winter. I was at first sight struck with the cleanliness of the streets, and, to do the people justice, they are kept in better order than most in other parts of Europe.

When viewed from the bay, the houses appear so low, as scarcely to expose more than the upper part of the window to the sight, an effect produced by the beach rising higher than the street, and the large heaps of stones that are piled along it to press down the fish when

dry. The middle of the town is not much above the high water-mark, and in stormy weather I have, more than once, seen the sea make its way into the streets. The winter before I was there, the water flooded the lower parts of many of the houses, at some distance from the sea; and unless some check in the form of a break-water be not attempted, it is not impossible that some of the houses in the centre may be shifted from their places, particularly as they merely rest upon stone platforms, and are not secured to any foundation.

CHAPTER VI.

DOMESTIC ECONOMY OF THE ICELANDERS.

In giving a sketch of the occupations and domestic economy of the Icelanders, the account must chiefly be limited to the consideration of them as an agricultural community, for in a country in which a population under 60,000 is dispersed over an extent equal to that of Ireland, it cannot be expected that many can confine themselves to distinct trades, or that much beyond the cultivation of a small portion of the soil can be undertaken. We accordingly find, that with the exception of a small number,

who form the clergy and magistracy, the whole of the people are peasants, dependent either on agriculture or fishing; and even as regards these two solitary professions, their followers are, in many cases, obliged to add farming to their other occupations, to enable them to earn a moderate subsistence. Yet, though the tilling of the land is the ostensible pursuit of all, many of the peasants, when at leisure, turn their attention to some handicraft, and employ their time in winter in constructing those few field implements which are of a form peculiar to the country, and therefore not imported.

The farms are mostly occupied by the land-owner, and in cases where rented, an annual payment is made by the tenant,—a part in butter, and the remainder in money, based on the number of "fiording," or ten pounds weight of that article, which can be produced on the farm. Indeed butter and fish are very generally used as a standard of value in most transactions

between the peasants: wages to servants are usually paid in the former, and in the latter are computed the taxes due to the king. There is a fixed standard of size for the fish, without which the Sysselman will reject them, as the deficiency, arising from bad condition, or any other cause, will have to be made good to him.

The Icelandic way of measuring land resembles the old English mode, by hides, the value and not the extent being ascertained. The word hundred is used to signify any quantity of land, however extensive, which can support a horse, cow, and six sheep; and this mode of calculating originated in the ancient custom of valuing property by the number of ells of "wadmal," or cloth, producible on it.

The landlord's rights are very limited, for when once in possession, the tenant cannot be ejected, unless a farm of equal value be provided for him, as long as he continues regular in the payment of his rent; nor is the landlord allowed to raise the rent when he pleases, as on a dispute

about the increased value of the land, the decision is referred to the Hreppstiore, and two other competent judges. On the other hand, a remnant of feudalism appears in the obligation of a tenant who holds land on the coast, to serve in his landlord's fishing-boat throughout the season. Though he receives his share of what is caught, the tenant is often injured thereby, particularly when in possession of a boat himself. This custom is so much at variance with all their others, that it can be only ascribed to the scantiness of population, which makes it a matter of difficulty to man all the vessels built for fishing.

The only portion of this extensive island, from which profit is derived, or to which any idea of property is attached, consists of the long valleys and plains which run between the lesser mountains on the sea-coast. The centre is a vast desert, covered with "Jokuls," a name used to distinguish mountains perpetually clad in snow; these extensive glaciers forbid the

approach of man, for as even the land at their bases is too elevated to admit of the growth of grass, the greatest obstacle is placed in the way of penetrating among them in the shape of want of forage for the horses necessary to the undertaking. In travelling from the south to the north coast, a track is selected which avoids these mountains as much as possible; but even this pass will take up thirty-six hours, during which time the horses must continue without any food whatever. In summer this part of the journey is usually got over with as little delay as possible; but in winter it must often be accomplished on foot, from the depth of snow precluding the use of horses.

Sledges are not in use in Iceland, the country being too mountainous, and the weather too stormy. Nor did I see more than one pair of snow-shoes while among these people. In form they differed materially from those used by the North American Indians, and in my opinion not so well calculated for supporting a weight, as

they were made of one piece of wood, about four feet long, and very narrow, with the points turned up. The pair I saw belonged to a man who had brought the mail from the North,—a journey which is often, in winter, attended with danger, not merely from the excessive cold, but from the sudden drifts of snow that overtake, and but too often overwhelm the traveller, who finds sufficient impediments to his progress in the darkness that shrouds him for twenty out of twenty-four hours. Yet I have heard it asserted that there are people living among the Jokuls, and that smoke seen in the distance is supposed to issue from their dwellings. Though I have heard this from more than one person, I can hardly give credit to the tale of any one having chosen such a residence; and attribute the whole to a popular belief that a band of robbers, who had fled at different times from justice, have selected this part of the country as a retreat, in which they can defy pursuit, and

form a society of their own, unrestrained by laws human or divine.

Between these Jokuls and the sea are chains of lesser mountains, partially covered at the base with a scanty verdure. Their summits, when not clothed in snow, that is hardly three months out of the twelve, present a black appearance, which spreads a gloom over the surrounding scenery, which is already far from cheerful. The valleys that intervene are, in general, extensive marshy plains; and it is in the more fertile part of these that the majority of the population is to be found.

These marshes often produce very good grass, and only require some expense, and more industry, to convert them into capital grazing land: but the almost insurmountable difficulties thrown in the way of any attempt of the kind, by the limited number of hands, and the rigour of the climate, would check the ardour of a more enterprising people than we are now con-

sidering. Their short summer scarcely suffices for the labours of the Sveit-Bondè, or upland peasant, who depends entirely on his flock for subsistence. Small as is his crop of hay, he is obliged to call in the aid of those who live on the coast, and are principally occupied in fishing. The latter, as soon as the fishing season is over, go to the Northern Amt for what is called *Kaupa vin*, or hired labour, and assist in the harvest, which takes up about six weeks, and then return to their former occupation. The winter rapidly sets in; and, during the ten months of its continuance, the intensity of the cold, the tempestuous state of the weather, and, more than either of these, the shortness of their days, render even the care of their flocks a difficult and often dangerous employment. For the loss of persons in quest of sheep is by no means an unusual occurrence; and on a snow-storm arising, it is absolutely necessary to collect them in hovels built for their shelter near the farm-house.

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At such times it is impossible to see or hear, for the wind surpasses in violence any idea that can be formed of it; yet it is to this wind that the shepherd must trust as a guide. Marking its direction he dashes into the storm; the distance to be accomplished is indeed, perhaps, short; but should he swerve from the right way, the least deviation is sure to be fatal; and woe to him should the wind chop in the least, while on this employment; such a change will inevitably seal his fate, and he will wander in the dark; till, numbed by the cold, he will fall into a sleep which soon becomes that of death.

"Alas!
Nor wife, nor children, more shall he behold,
Nor friends, nor sacred home! On every nerve
The deadly winter seizes, shuts up sense,
And, o'er his inmost vitals creeping cold
Lays him along the snows a stiffened corse,
Stretched out and bleaching in the northern blast."

THOMSON.

Instances of such accidents are not unknown even in the immediate neighbourhood of Rei-

kiavik. About Christmas, 1834, a young woman imprudently quitted the church alone before the service was over, with the intention of nursing a child that she had left at home. Before she had got out of the town a violent snow-storm was raging, which rendered it impossible to see an inch before her. Maternal solicitude, however, overcame her fears, and she hurried on towards her house, which was not more than a quarter of a mile distant; but she lost her way, and wandered about, till, becoming drowsy, she fell asleep. Upwards of one hundred persons went in quest of her for many successive days, and though the search was repeated several times during the winter, it proved unavailing, till the end of the following March, when a partial thaw discovered her corpse frozen in a sitting posture, within a few yards of her home!

Though so great a part of the year would seem from its inclemency to preclude labour, the winter is perhaps the period of greatest

activity, and these tenants of the frigid zone can scarcely boast of

"Their long nights of revelry and ease."

In summer the fatigue of mowing, and carrying home the hay, is comparatively light, and is rather a time of merry-making than of labour; but in winter each member of the family has his appointed share of business, to which he applies in earnest till the return of summer. It is usual for one individual to be sent out to the coast, and there engage himself to serve in a fishing-boat for the season. Another has the care of the cattle allotted to him; the making of horseshoes, and other smith's work, employs a third; and the remainder of the family of both sexes occupy themselves in making nets, and knitting their clothes.

In some houses of a better description, a loom of a rude construction, serves to supply the inmates with a kind of native cloth called Wadmal, which is used for trousers and petticoats; but the knitting of frocks and coarse stockings for exportation, as well as their own

use, is a more general occupation than weaving. The clothes are not dyed until they are completed, and then undergo the operation by being wrapped up with indigo and logwood scattered in the folds, and in that state boiled till they have acquired the desired depth of colour, which is mostly a blue black. The making of ropes, by the tedious process of plaiting the wool by hand, also takes up no inconsiderable part of their time, as well as the providing themselves with sandals, which being of raw hide last but a very short time.

Huddled together in a small apartment, usually the loft, without stove or any warmth but that arising from the confined atmosphere, and the packing of twelve or fifteen persons in a place of just sufficient capacity to contain their bulk, the family continue their labours till a late hour in the night, often till two and three in the morning, enlivened by listening to one of the party who chants some Saga out of a book by the light of a dim seal-oil lamp. At

times the monotony of the single voice is relieved by a hymn, the kind of music most relished by the Icelanders, in which the whole family join. Occasionally they indulge in instrumental music, and the Longspeil is taken down from the wall to serve as an accompaniment to their mournful ditties.

This is the only musical instrument known among them, and is by no means calculated to enliven their spirits; indeed, if its gloomy tones are capable of producing any effect, I should say that it is that of instilling a black melancholy into the mind. In form it is a mere oblong tapering box, about two feet long and three inches wide, terminating somewhat like the head of a fiddle, and played upon with a violin bow. When in use it is laid upon a table, and the forefinger is applied only to the outer one of its three steel wires; and were it not for this difference it would give one the idea of a guitar in a rapid state of decline.

Besides this mode of recreation, it is rare

to enter a house that is not provided with a considerable number of books, in the selection of which, as in other matters, the seriousness of their national character is displayed, as besides the old Norse poems and sagas, works of a devotional tendency, are almost always to be met with. Yet, notwithstanding the universal attention paid to religion, which is remarkable, there appears no fondness for ostentatious display of that kind, nor do any set up claims to superior sanctity. In every family the morning work is commenced, and the evening concluded, with a prayer, in which every member joins; the fishing-boat is not launched, before the "formadur," or chief, has implored divine protection for the crew while they remain at sea; nor even in travelling will an Icelander commence his day's journey, before he has covered his face with his hat, and repeated a short supplication that he may accomplish it in safety.

At church it is not always possible for them

to attend; rivers and other natural obstacles, added to the distances that intervene between their churches, prevent them from assembling in as large numbers in winter as they do when the weather is at all favourable; but when there is a possibility of joining in public worship, there are, perhaps, few countries where so large a proportion of the inhabitants are to be found collected at one time in church. Indeed, during the winter I remained among them, I do not recollect the congregation of the church at Reikiavik having ever been thin, though many of those that attended it came five or six miles from their homes.

The shortness of the summers puts the cultivation of grain out of the question, or, indeed, the raising of any thing but a few vegetables in gardens, the introduction of which is of modern date. During my stay, I made a small kitchen-garden, and sowed it in the month of July, for the frost was not out of the ground in the middle of June, but the produce was in no great

state of forwardness on my leaving Iceland at the beginning of September. I was able, however, to take away a few potatoes and turnips; the first had reached the enormous size of tennis-balls, and the turnip might have well passed for very large white radishes. Cabbages and lettuces had succeeded the best; yet, altogether, it must be allowed, that it is not exactly the place to exercise the talents of gardeners, as the time for sowing and that for reaping come too near together, and the rapidity of the vegetation is not proportionate to the time that it lasts.

The soil itself does not seem unadapted to the raising of grain, for rye has been found in some places growing wild. I have also seen some wheat in the garden of the Landfoged, which at the beginning of October was well looking, and about two feet high; yet it gave no indication, after that, of any intention of ripening. The total absence of corn in the present day has subjected the people to many

ills, by restricting them, in a great measure, to the use of animal food, and especially fish, which nourishment, added to their neglect of cleanliness, has probably tended to keep the leprosy among them, as well as many other cutaneous disorders which but too frequently offend the sight of the stranger wherever he goes.

The whole of the valleys are used as pastures; but the only part of the farm upon which manure is deposited, or care bestowed, is the ground immediately round the house. The size of this meadow varies considerably, and depends upon the quantity of live stock that the rest of the farm is able to support in summer, and is, in fact, the land upon which the cattle must depend for winter sustenance. As the house is generally built on a slope, or gentle eminence, to keep it dry, the meadow improves its appearance, and being covered with innumerable small hillocks, has much the appearance of a country churchyard in England. A

stone wall, or low earthen mound, generally encloses it, though the necessity of this defence is often obviated by the numerous dogs that prowl about the farm-house, and are taught, at the sound of a rattle, to chase any horses or cattle that are tempted by the superior quality of the grass to trespass on the "toon," as it is called; and its privacy is further secured by a law that allows the detention of any strange horse found on it after the 1st of May, till a fine of three silver marks is paid by the owner.

Of late years an attempt has been made by the more industrious to level these knolls, an operation rendered very slow by the scantiness of hands, and in which they have not been much encouraged, by finding not unfrequently, that after the lapse of some time the ground sinks, and reassumes its former appearance.

After a mild winter, the month of May generally finds the ground in a fit state for tillage. The first step is the collecting of manure, and spreading it on the toon, but as the horses

lie on spungy turf instead of litter, the land is not overburdened with richness. It is then beaten into the soil with clubs, and about the middle of June the grass begins to grow, with some rapidity, and is fit for mowing in August. When in its prime it is about six inches high, and of very unequal length, and is moreover much beset with every variety of weeds. From the unevenness of the surface, and the number of stones that are never removed, the haymakers are obliged to employ small scythes, with a straight handle and blade about eighteen inches long, in shape like a carving-knife. With this implement they rather shave than mow the hillocks perfectly bare, rarely leaving a blade even between the intervals, which are so narrow as not to admit of more than a man's foot. Yet, however expert they may become in the use of this scythe, the Icelanders can hardly mow a quarter of the same space that is usual in England in a day, and would probably be overtaken by the winter before the harvest was over,

did they not employ strangers to assist them. Both men and women work, the former receiving, besides their board, from two to three "fiörding" of butter a week, and the latter half that quantity. While I was in Iceland, a fiörding, or ten pounds weight, was considered equivalent to four-and-sixpence; but as work in summer is paid very highly, the general rate of wages must not be judged of by this particular payment.

The month of July is chiefly taken up by the preparations for the journey to the coast with their tallow, wool, and other commodities, and the bartering of their produce in the different ports. On their return, after an absence perhaps of two or three weeks, the whole of the hay is stacked, and it is customary for the farmers to give a feast to those who have assisted at the harvest. Much merriment prevails at these festivals, and the simplicity of the fare, consisting of rye-porridge and fish, with the addition of the first mutton killed that year, is compensated for by large bowls of rum punch, and the

broaching of kegs of corn brandy. To the immoderate use of the latter spirit the majority are but too much addicted, when within their reach. It is more fiery than any British spirit, and cannot be drunk otherwise than raw, as the least addition of water makes it turn as white as milk; yet its cheapness (for in summer it does not exceed the price of porter in England), causes great quantities to be consumed, and encourages the people to destroy their health, and abridge their lives, by this pernicious poison.

Before the winter sets in, the only remaining business to attend to, is the gathering of the wethers and barren ewes that have been sent among the mountains for the summer, to save as much of the grass as possible round the homestead. For this purpose, at the beginning of September the Hreppstiores call upon every farmer in their district to send a man in search of the sheep. On reaching that part of the country to which the flocks generally resort, the whole body divide into parties, and drive all the

sheep they find into pens; and proceed in this way every day, until they have gathered the whole number that had been turned out in May. Occasionally some of the sheep stray so far as to preclude their recovery that year, and the owners have to wait for them till the following season. The business of each man claiming his own stock then follows, and the party separates after two or three weeks of roving in the mountains. The name given to this annual expedition is Rettys, derived probably from the fair adjudication of each man's property; and the whole proceeding seems to be carried on with much good faith, as few complaints occur of the sheep getting in the hands of any but the real owners.

CHAPTER VII.

Icelandic houses — Dress — Poor-laws — Leprosy — National character.

It has often struck me as a matter to be regretted, that in a country where manners and customs have been so little affected by the lapse of time as in Iceland, and where even the language has scarcely undergone any change for ten centuries, the buildings, which in other countries are the principal objects that recall past ages to us, should have, from the first, been constructed of such perishable materials as to require renewal from each generation into

whose hands they have passed. This has caused the island to be perfectly destitute of antiquarian remains; in fact whatever in it is ancient is the work of nature, and it would be vainer to look for reliques of antiquity in it than even in North America, where the rude Indian, in handing down to his children the customs of his forefathers, leaves behind him no more lasting memorial than the birchen wigwam which has sheltered him in his last moments, and will ere long disappear.

There is, I believe, at present but one solitary vestige of any ancient edifice to be found throughout the island, and that in a very imperfect state. The neighbourhood of Esiuberg is noted as the spot where human sacrifices were offered to the heathen gods during the tenth century; and the people at Kialarnœs, still point out the almost imperceptible remains of the temple where these horrors were committed. Many traditions are of course current, but little more, probably, than the site of the temple is to

be depended upon ; and it is not unlikely that several stone barrows found about have an equal claim to antiquity.

Judging from the account of their old writers, I should think that their rude architecture had not undergone much change in its style, and, with the exception of their wealth being lessened since their loss of independence, it is probable that a modern Bai is distributed much as their ancient houses were in their more palmy state. I remember an old book being shown me that contained a print of the principal hall in the house of one of their chieftains. At the upper end is represented the " Ondveige," or seat of honour, mentioned in Regner Lodbrog's Death Song, at which the master presided, supported by distinguished guests. The walls on either side were concealed with curtains, behind which were the sleeping-places of the family, and the light appears to have been admitted through openings in the roof, such as the skylights in Gothic halls.

The most usual site selected for the farm-houses is the northern side of a valley, so as to be protected from the wind by the mountains at the back, and to enjoy as great a share of sunshine as possible. The various buildings cover a considerable extent of ground, and each apartment has a separate roof. The gables all face the front of the house, and are mostly ornamented with fanciful vanes, and wooden crosses, painted red. The entrances are on the south side, and only the principal one admits into the interior where the family dwell; the others lead into the dairy, smithy, and tool-house, which do not communicate with any other apartment. The stables and cow-houses, form the extremity of the building, to which is attached an enclosure, surrounded by a wall, about six feet high, where the hay is piled up in small stacks, and to which, as there is no gateway, the only access is by a ladder.

The walls of the house rarely exceed eight feet in height, and are pierced with a window or

door under each gable. Their thickness, and the necessity of making the openings of the windows wider on the outside than at the casements, gives these holes the appearance of the embrasures of a rampart, which is further increased by the house being covered with grass, and built on a gentle slope. I had often observed a number of cows' skulls lying on the wall of the hay-yard, and had been at a loss to discover to what use they could be put, till I found that they were universally kept as stools for milking. Occasionally a very small garden is to be met with in front of farm-houses, in which a few dwarfish vegetables live, but can scarcely be said to grow. Round about are scattered numbers of small hovels, sufficiently high to admit of sheep taking shelter in them during stormy weather; and on the sea-coast, an additional building, called a Hiattle, is always to be found, which serves to dry their fish in, its four sides being made of open bars of wood to admit the wind from every quarter.

As yet we have only viewed the exterior of the house, which is certainly not very inviting; and I fear, that on examination, the interior will not tend to change our opinion. Entering by the principal door, we proceed up a damp stone passage, ornamented with saddles, bridles, and all kinds of horse furniture. At every step the light diminishes, and, as it entirely vanishes, we are left to grope our way through low doorways, till we arrive at the "Eld Huus," or kitchen, in the centre of the building, the only place in which a fire is ever kindled, except among the richest people. To the right and left are various apartments destined for household purposes; and, after many twistings and turnings, we reach the "guest rum," reserved for the purpose indicated by its name. It has the advantage of being panelled, and contains the best furniture in the house. When not occupied by a stranger, it serves as a receptacle for every article not in immediate use. The side-saddles, spinning-wheels, &c., are piled on the bed, in

the greatest confusion, and the rest of the apartment is crowded with large chests, which do the double duty of containing the attire of the family and serving as seats; and as all this takes place in rooms which rarely exceed twelve feet by ten, it may be easily conceived that there is not much space left for the live inmates.

The garret, which is the place principally occupied by the family, is approached through an opening in the ceiling, by the assistance of a ladder. The form of the garret will not admit of standing upright, except in the middle; but the whole is made available by having berths, like on board ship, along each side. The room is lighted by a small window at each end, and not more so than is sufficient to see one's way. In this style of apartment the whole family sleep, and the necessity of a fire is thus avoided by the numbers that are crowded together. In this dark room, it is often dangerous to move along from the prevalent custom

of leaving some of the boards in the flooring loose and unplaned. In case of a death occurring in the house, at a time when it would be inconvenient to fetch timber from the coast, recourse can at once be had to this part of the floor for materials for a coffin, and the deficiency caused thereby can be made good the following summer.

While at work in winter the women generally sit on their beds cross-legged; and to counteract the effects of remaining long in the same position, they acquire a habit of swinging their bodies from side to side. This is not entirely confined to the females; and it becomes so powerful, that I have often observed men, while standing in the open air, in conversation, keep up this sort of perpetual motion, without being conscious of it.

The common costume of the men is a knit jacket and waistcoat, fitting close to the body, and devoid of collar. A red or green edging is usually added to this part of the dress, as well

as numerous small silver buttons down the front and the sleeves: a very deep blue is the universally adopted colour. On journeys, overalls, almost wholly covered with leather, are worn; and in stormy weather a diminutive blue cloak, hardly reaching to the knees, is added as a riding-habit.

The every-day dress of the women is of the deepest blue, and consists of a knit jacket, fastened up to the chin with hooks and eyes, and long bunchy petticoats of "wadmal." The the throat is protected by a black silk kerchief worn as by men amongst us; and the hair falls confined on the shoulders from beneath a unco[illegible] cap, to the end of which is fast- conical clot[illegible] silver acorn, a long silk ened, by a gold o[illegible] side of the face. tassel that hangs on o[illegible] ket is thrown During the warm months the ja[illegible] orna- off, and a scarlet bodice is discovered, mented with stripes of gold lace over the seams, and fastened in front with a silver chain that runs through eyes of the same material.

At church a smart jacket, called a "treja," is worn over the bodice, short enough to display the scarlet beneath it. Every seam is covered with velvet of a colour that will set off the ground on which it is sewn, which varies according to the taste of the owner. Round the neck a stiff velvet ruff, worked in silver lace, is surmounted by a rather gaudy neckerchief. A massive silver belt, made of plates handsomely worked, encircles the waist, and from the front of it three or four ornaments in filligree, of the size and form of an old-fashioned watch, are suspended. Both the petticoat and apron, which is never dispensed with, are garnished with numerous rows of velvet, which give the costume a rich though somewhat heavy appearance.

With this dress, the hair is turned up and concealed under a high cap, resembling nothing of the kind worn in any other country that I have ever been in. The principal part of the head-dress is a skull-cap, with a peak like the crest of a helmet, covered with white linen, and

studded with pins; and the part that supports this projection is covered with a silk handkerchief, crossed round the head, so as only to leave the cone, which is called "skoit-faldur." exposed to the view.

The absence of trees prevents the Icelanders tanning skins, and obliges them to make use of raw hides in every case in which they will at all answer the purpose; we accordingly never find them wearing shoes, but substituting for them sandals of raw sheepskin or cow-hide. These are formed of a single piece, sewn together at the heels, and puckered from the toes towards the instep, and are bound round the ankle by several thongs crossed over one another.

The bits of their bridles are all of home manufacture, and are made with very heavy bars of brass, sufficient to keep in subjection far more powerful horses than their quiet ponies. It is the fashion to cover the saddle with a blue and red shabrack, at the top of which a small

embroidered cushion is strapped. The stirrups are frequently attached to the saddle by chains instead of leathers, nor is it uncommon to see half of the reins composed of iron links.

Females ride in side-saddles, made like elbow-chairs, and rest their feet on a board hung from them. Those used by wealthy persons have the outside, as well as the headstall and crupper, completely covered with plates of brass, curiously embossed. The poorer women, however, rarely use the side-saddle, but ride astraddle on a pad, with their feet fixed in wooden stirrups, so short as to raise the knees considerably above the horse's back.

As from the absence of wheel-carriages, every thing has to be transported on the backs of horses, it might be expected that the Icelanders would be particularly expert in loading their beasts of burden, and avoid galling them; but, perhaps, no people attend less to the state of their horses' backs than they, and almost every second animal used for carrying, is in a continual state

of torture, from the sores to which they are subject from the kind of pack-saddles in use. These are nothing more than a square piece of turf, selected from the marshes for its pliancy; the sort used is called "reidinga," and consists entirely of fibres, and in appearance resembles a very thick mat. When the back is severely galled, the only remedy ever thought of is the insertion of two or three horse-hair setons in the chest, which, instead of giving relief, only produces new wounds, and inflicts additional torture on the poor animals.

Before concluding the chapter, it will. perhaps, not be superfluous to say a word concerning their management of the poor. The charitable institutions themselves are limited, both as regards number and means; but as every individual is bound by law to support his needy relatives, as far as the fourth degree of kindred, and as the smallness of the population gives scope for the employment of all who are able and willing to work, the claims upon indi-

vidual benevolence become comparatively few. Mendicity is unknown, and the wants of those who have no relations to look to, are supplied by the operation of a system adapted to the habits of the people, and rendered effective by good administration.

The care of the poor is committed to the Hreppstiore, who is assisted by the clergyman of the parish, and an individual who acts as treasurer. By these three persons, rates, according to the urgency of the case, are levied on the inhabitants: but the more usual way, except at Reikiavik, is to billet the old and infirm upon the peasants of the Hrepp. Although the latter are not bound to keep a pauper in their house longer than six months, and may require the Hreppstiore at the end of that period to remove him to the next neighbour, they rarely avail themselves of this power, but keep him for the rest of his life. In the same way, a widow left with several children, will find no difficulty in bringing them up; and it is very

common for persons to take them off her hands and adopt them.

By a law, which I am not sure is always strictly enforced, no man can contract marriage unless he is possessed of a hundred of land; but as this would be difficult to procure on the coast, a six-oared boat, in complete trim, is considered an equivalent for the land.

The only hospitals to be found are for the reception of lepers; and they were originally instituted, not so much with a view of attempting cures, as of separating from the healthy part of the community persons afflicted with that loathsome disease. They are none of them within the immediate reach of medical aid; and the persons who have the care of the patients do not pretend to do more than keep them alive. As it is, the faculty of the whole island consist of one physician and chemist at Reikiavik, and four surgeons dispersed over the rest of the country. Not more than five years ago both the land-physicus and apothecary resided at the

extremity of a promontory, more than two miles distant from the town and it was necessary to send that distance for the least article that was wanted. The physician has a salary of one hundred pounds per annum and a residence, and the apothecary, besides the monopoly of the island, receives an allowance from the king for the annual distribution of a small quantity of medicines gratis. The pay of the surgeons is but small, nor is the addition of some trifling fees from their wealthier patients adequate to the labour of superintending the health of a people scattered over such an extent of ground.

The hospitals are supported by the fishery, the whole of the fish that is caught upon a fixed day being divided into one more than the usual number of shares, and that portion belongs to the hospitals. A day closely following upon Easter Sunday, is usually selected; but should the fishery fail to produce five fish to a share, the hospital's right is not taken till it amounts to that number.

I have never been myself in any of the leper hospitals, and cannot therefore speak positively as to their internal management; but I have heard from Icelanders who had been in the one which formerly existed at Skalholt, that filth and misery were the principal features in it; perhaps since that time some improvement may have found its way even into these abodes of wretchedness. The generality of houses are but ill calculated to keep their inmates in health; and it can scarcely be expected that when the system is in a state of corruption, it can be renovated by crowding the patients into dirty hovels, from which fresh air and light are excluded, and where the food is of the same unwholesome kind that perhaps tended to bring on the disease.

In stature the Icelanders are considerably above the middle height, and though not remarkably slight, I should say they were altogether a spare people. This only refers to the male part of the population, and may perhaps

be attributed to their clothes fitting rather tight to their persons. The women, on the contrary, exhibit the reverse, and are rather plump. Both sexes are fair, but I was rather disappointed at finding that white hair, instead of being universal, is by no means as common as in Scotland and Denmark. The women keep their good looks longer than might be expected from the rudeness of the weather, and have a much livelier cast of countenance than the other sex. The men occasionally wear their hair long, but not so commonly as the Swedes; nor do I recollect more than two or three instances of the beard being allowed to attain a patriarchal length, though it is not at all unusual to see it verge towards it through neglect.

In the character of the Icelanders I should say gloom prevailed to a great degree, and certainly the first impression on a stranger's mind will not be favourable to them. His patience will often be put to the test by their dilatory habits, and his temper will be further tried by

their manners, many of which are very disgusting; such as transferring milk from one bottle to another through the medium of their mouths, and several other customs too offensive to be particularized; but he will find much honesty and wish to oblige, when it is in their power.

Their hospitality should rather be measured by their wish, than their ability to treat guests well. Of pride they are by no means deficient, and they add to it a great degree of stubbornness, which they mistake for independence, and though rarely warm, they are always courteous in their manner. As regards their intellect, they are above mediocrity, and only want room to exercise their talents, which cannot be denied them, when we call to mind that the first living sculptor, Thorwaldsen, is an Icelander.

CHAPTER VIII.

Division of the country—Laws—Courts—Excommunication.

Till within a century of the present time it was usual for the kings of Denmark to confer the government of Iceland on admirals, who occasionally visited, but did not constantly reside on the island. In Stephenson's history of the eighteenth century a list is given of all the public officers during that period, from which it appears that some only landed for a few days,

and that others never even approached the seat of their government. When they did remain for any length of time, they took up their abode at Bessestad; but the governorship seems, on the whole, to have been a sinecure given to reward naval officers. As, however, this system was found not to work well, a governor was sent over, who remained there the whole time that he kept the office, and the title of Stiff-Amtmand, was conferred on him, to denote that his authority extended to ecclesiastical as well as civil affairs, the word Stift signifying in Danish, diocese, and Amt, province. Besides a general control over the whole island, the southern Amt is under his immediate care; while Westerland is confided to an inferior Amtman, and Nordland and Osterland are united under another officer, of the same denomination. The chief governor has, with one exception, been always either a Dane or a Norwegian, but the inferior situations are generally intrusted to natives.

The four provinces are subdivided into nineteen Syssells, or counties, in the following manner:

Westerland.	*Sudland.*	*Nordland.*	*Osterland.*
Isafiord	Borgafiord	Hunavatn	North Mule
Bardestrand	Kiosè and Gulbringè	Hegranes	South Mule
Strand	Aarnes	Thingeys	West Skapta Field
Snœfields	Ragga Valè		East Skapta Field
Hnappadalls	Westman Isles		
Myre			

Over each division is placed a Syssellmand, to whose decision all cases, both civil and criminal, are submitted in the first instance. He acts as auctioneer at all public sales, administers to the effects of deceased persons, is notary public, and collects all taxes due to the king. For these multifarious duties he is remunerated by receiving a third of the proceeds of the taxes. The profits vary considerably in different Syssells. Aarnes and Ranga Valle, the two best, are worth about two hundred pounds a year each, but the generality fall far short of that sum, and

I have heard of one in Nordland that did not yield more than twenty-six rix dollars a year. Before any one can be appointed to even the least profitable of these offices, he must have studied jurisprudence in the university of Copenhagen; and those who have distinguished themselves there are subsequently removed, when vacancies occur, to the easier and more lucrative places of Amtmen, and judges of the Lands-over-Rett.

Before a civil action can be commenced, the dispute must be referred to two persons in the Hrepp, who constitute the Forliks Connifior. Should the mediation of these officers bring the contending parties to terms, the agreement is final, otherwise it must be brought before the Sysselmand, from whose decision there is an appeal to the Lands-over-Rett, or High Court. From this tribunal the action may be removed again to the Cancellie, or Chancery, in Copenhagen, and, lastly, to the king, whose decision is in all cases final.

In criminal cases, the Syssellmand forwards his judgment to his Amtmand, who, on disapproval of the sentence, sends it to be decided by the High Court. But when a capital offence has been committed, the law cannot be enforced before the sentence has been confirmed by the King's signature. A long period must naturally elapse before a trial can be brought to this stage, ships sailing but twice a year to Denmark; but the infliction of death is of such rare occurrence, that a more rapid mode of checking offences is unnecessary. Offences against property may be said to be the only ones known, and even these are both rare and trivial. During the year I remained there, only one conviction for theft took place at Reikiavik, and the value of the article stolen did not amount to five shillings. Horse and sheep stealers are transported to Denmark, and confined in the goal of Copenhagen; but all other offenders, when their thefts are not accompanied by aggravating circumstances, are let off with a flogging. The pain of

this correction must be supposed to be applied more to the mind than the body, for the severity of it does not exceed that of the punishment daily administered to schoolboys in England. The greatest number of stripes must not exceed twenty-seven, repeated three days running, and the sentence is put into force privately.

Adultery is also visited by the law with a whipping, when repeated. The first infraction of the statute subjects the delinquent to a fine, and the third to hard labour at Copenhagen. In later years this law has not been acted upon with all its rigour, and the corporal punishment has been sometimes commuted for a pecuniary penalty; and I know of one instance in which a man convicted of repeated offences against this branch of the code, was punished by a confinement of eight days on bread and water.

As there is no prison in the island, when a man is accused of an offence, the Hreppstiore notifies to him that he is not to quit the district he lives in; and should he disregard this in-

junction, the officer will at once confine him in his house. The summary punishments of flogging and fining make any privation of liberty unnecessary, and the difficulty of leaving the country secretly adds to the security of the delinquent, though left at large. I have, however, heard of an instance of persons escaping while under sentence. A man and his wife, living at Havnifiord, had been condemned to imprisonment in the gaol of Copenhagen; as it was winter and no opportunity offered of transporting them thither, they were left at home to await the departure of the first ship: but one morning they were both missed, and upon searching their Bai, a paper was found containing some money, with directions that it should be employed in the support of a child that they left behind. Neither of them was ever heard of after; and the only probable conjecture about the matter is that they made for the Shetlands, for it was never suspected

that they had committed suicide, which is an act almost unknown in Iceland.

The court called Lands-over-Rett, or the supreme court of the land, consists of three judges, the chief of whom is styled Justitiarias, and the others Assessors, and each has an equal weight in the decision of the matter before them. The proceedings are not carried on *vivâ voce*, nor does the court sit longer at a time than to receive the written affidavits and arguments of both sides, or to read the judgment it has agreed upon. Its institution is but of recent date, as it was only at the beginning of this century that it took the place of the ancient tribunal held yearly at Thingvalle. To give the country the advantage of more frequent sessions the present permanent court was established at Reikiavik, where it assembles every month.

As far as regards the ceremonial part, nothing appertaining to a tribunal could evince greater

simplicity. On the morning of the meeting, an officer announces the fact by beating an old drum round the town. The three judges take their seats at the upper end of a very indifferent room, dressed in crimson uniforms and cocked hats, before a common table: the sitting of the court is again formally proclaimed, the president then rises, reads the sentences from a book, and having signed them, the court adjourns till the following month. The proceedings are carried on in Icelandic, and afterwards translated into Danish, that they be submitted to the Cancellie at Copenhagen.

At present there is no sign of trial by jury to be found in their judicial proceedings; but a practice mentioned in the ecclesiastical history, and somewhat similar to the wager of law in England, would make it appear that such has not always been the case. The practice alluded to is the judgment by Tylftar Eidr, on the oath of twelve men; that is, a man able to find eleven others to join with him in swearing to

his innocence was released from the charge made against him. This species of challenge is mentioned at a very early period of their history, and has by this time been lost sight of; but it is certain that no people have a greater sense of the solemnity of an oath than the Icelanders. They are at no time very willing to take one, and I have known a man pay a disputed debt, though he might have avoided it with a clear conscience, rather than be brought to swear that it was not due.

Civil actions are but rare, and are limited to matters of trifling consideration. Disputes about the possession of landed property might be more common, were they not checked by a register of the transfer of estates called the "Jord Bok," or land book, and by its means the various owners of the soil can be traced to the remotest period, as well as the pedigree of many who go back to the time of Ingolf. The use of surnames is restricted to the few who have found it necessary to take one while re-

maining in foreign countries. The mass, in general, distinguish one another by adding the name of the place they live at, as Peter of Engoe, John of Selsund; in writing, the name of the father takes the place of surname, with "son" or "dotter" attached, as Gudmunder Thorsteinson and Margaret Jonsdotter. Neither is it usual to prefix any word to the names of persons when addressing them, unless they have some Danish title; and the only exception made is in favour of the clergy, who are never spoken of or to, without the word Sire being used.

The ecclesiastical establishment of the island is on a greater scale than might be expected; it includes a bishop, a provost for each Syssel, and about two hundred and fifty parishes; and as in many cases one, or even two, extra churches are annexed to a living, and the clergyman is obliged to keep a curate, the whole number of priests may amount to about three hundred. The office of provost, though attended with some trouble, makes but little

addition to the income of the priest, except in the single case of the provost of Gardè, who is styled the "Stift-Profastur," or Dean of the diocese. The appointment of the latter, as well as that of bishop, is in the hands of the king, and the rest of the clergy are presented to livings by the governor.

The support of the parochial clergy, is derived principally from the glebe land attached to their benefices. To increase their trifling income, a fixed annual sum by way of tithe is paid by each parishioner, according to the value of the land he occupies. The pastor can also claim a day's work yearly, and the privilege of having a lamb kept for him from October to the following April, by each farmer. This, with a small offering at Christmas, and a few trifling fees for baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial, constitute the whole of his stipend.

The pittance derived from these various sources does not in many cases amount to ten pounds sterling, and with this sum he has to support

a wife and family. As, however, their ecclesiastical dues alone would not suffice to support life, clergymen labour like their neighbours, and depend upon their cattle like other farmers. Although some few of the priesthood are relieved from absolutely labouring themselves, by holding the best livings, by far the greater part are rather below than above the peasantry in pecuniary circumstances; and were it by money that the respect for the clergy was kept up, they would long ago have sunk below the level of the people. It is, however, to their education that they owe the deference at all times shown them, and the priest, who has during the week-days been employed like a simple peasant, rises to his proper position on Sunday, and is as much respected, and probably more beloved, by his parishioners, than his brethren in countries were the church and wealth go together.

For some time subsequent to the introduction of Christianity, the appointment of the clergy remained in the hands of the landowners. The

two bishoprics of Skalholt and Holum, which were founded in 1056 and 1107, were subjected to foreign control till the reformation; they were first placed under the jurisdiction of the Bishops of Bremen and Hamburg; at a later period included in the Archbishopric of Lund in Sweden; and lastly they were transferred to the care of the Bishops of Drontheim in Norway.

By degrees the power of the church of Rome extended itself even to this remote land, and the prelates availed themselves of it to claim the right of nominating to benefices. The monastic institutions also increased in number, and were disseminated in various parts of the country; but both their possessions, and the patronage of the bishops, were seized by the king at the Reformation. The present king, however, has reserved to himself the gift of only the four best preferments, and those he confers on the Icelandic students who have distinguished themselves the most at the university of Copenhagen.

Until the end of the eighteenth century the original divisionin to two sees continued in force; but the funds for the support of two prelates having become inadequate, the island was, by an order of the king in 1797, formed into one "Stift," or diocese. The lands whence the bishops derived their revenues were sold, and an income of 1000 specie dollars, drawn from the public treasury, was granted in their place to the sole prelate.

For many years the marriage of the clergy was permitted, and we even find that Islief, the first Bishop of Skalholt, was succeeded by his son. At first, also, the ecclesiastical profession was much sought after by the higher orders, and many united civil and religious offices in their persons. The church of Rome, however, made objections to this practice, and in A.D. 1190 succeeded in abolishing it; though the effect of this injunction was by no means advantageous to the priesthood, either as regarded their interests or respectability. Many who had

their means reduced by this change, were obliged to have recourse to handicraft, and some who disliked this new mode of obtaining a livelihood became dissolute characters, and brought disgrace on their order.

The popes, meanwhile, did not overlook the possibility of drawing some fiscal advantages from the people. Accordingly a crusade was preached in 1275 in Iceland, and the inhabitants were enjoined to come forward with their quota for the expedition. The Pontiff at the same time prudently sent over a number of indulgences for sale. The novelty of the undertaking, and the promise of eternal happiness to those who embarked in the holy war, so worked upon the feelings of the people, that numbers took up the cross; but when the enthusiasm of the moment had passed away, and they considered the uncertainty of the undertaking, they purchased dispensations from the obligation of proceeding to the Holy Land, and

relinquished the glory of defeating the Saracens to their southern neighbours.

The experiment had succeeded so well, as far as the interests of the church were concerned, that it was repeated in 1289. The same arguments were used, and the same alternative was offered to them, of compounding for money, but both failed, and the age of crusades passed away without one Icelander being recorded to have

> "Streamed the ensign of the Christian cross
> Against black pagans, Turks, and Saracens."

A tenth of the revenue of the church was afterwards claimed by the popes, and though not annually exacted, it appears to have been frequently collected, under the name of "Pava tiunde," or Pope's tithe. They also contributed their mite to the tax known as Peter's Penny, the payment of which was commanded in 1305 by the King of Norway, and enforced under the penalty of excommunication.

This last stretch of priestly power did not find its way into the country till near two hundred years after the introduction of Christianity. Until that period the clergy had been satisfied with mild remonstrances; when their power was increased, they were not able to resist the temptation of upholding their authority by the terror of their punishments, rather than the respect due to their virtues. Accordingly the first sentence of excommunication was passed in 1180, and it appears that this mode of disposing of persons obnoxious to the priests, was afterwards not unfrequently resorted to. The minor excommunication (for the punishment was of two kinds which differed materially in severity) was called "Forbod," and subjected individuals to privation of worship, and to separation from the congregation.

The greater punishment which the church made use of when it intended to crush an individual, was of a far more serious nature. It was called Bann, and as its consequences were

terrible, the pronouncing of it was attended with much ceremony; the form was in Latin, though it was also at times repeated in Norse, and Icelandic, to increase the effect produced on those present. On the appointed day the bishop entered the church, in full canonicals, attended by the clergy of his diocese each bearing a taper in his hand. The prelate began by calling down curses on the culprit in the name of the Deity; upon every part of his person, and upon every act of which he was capable, individual curses were pronounced; not a function of nature was omitted, whether moving or still, sleeping or waking, the anathema was to be upon him. After having cursed him in detail, the bishop declared the recusant a component part of the devil, and ended with these words: "As these lights are extinguished so may thy soul be extinguished in Hell to all eternity!" As the last denunciation passed from his lips the whole of the priests immersed their tapers into water, and the church remained

in complete darkness, while the victim was expelled from it, an outcast from society, and divested of every privilege that a human being can lay claim to.

The reformation swept away these abuses, and the clergy gradually returned to their primitive position. The right of marriage was also restored with the introduction of the Lutheran religion, which is the only creed that is allowed in the island, and is also likely to remain the only one, for as yet but one solitary case of dissent from it has occurred, in the person of a Socinian.

CHAPTER IX.

Laugarness—Kialarness—Dulness of the winter—Amusements.

My arrival in Iceland took place at too late a part of the year to admit of my wandering very far before the setting in of the winter with all its rigour. I was therefore obliged to confine my rambles to a journey to the Geysers, in the month of September, and a few visits in the neighbourhood of Reikiavik. As, however, I made another trip to the boiling springs the following year, at a time when none of my

countrymen have seen them, I think it preferable to give a detailed account of my second journey, which afforded me an opportunity of judging of the effects of the seasons on these fountains.

I took an early opportunity of paying my respects to the Bishop Steingrimr Jonson, at his residence at Laugarness about three miles further up the Bay of Reikiavik. His predecessor, Geir Vidalin, had lived in the town, and at his death the King of Denmark had a stone dwelling built for the present bishop, which he now inhabits. The house, though by no means large, and but one story high, was built by the government at an outlay of about three thousand pounds, which was chiefly incurred by the masons and other workmen being all sent over from Denmark, and being employed three summers in the work. The interior is comfortable and has several good sitting-rooms, besides offices for depositing the ecclesiastical records of the island. The bishop

possesses also a considerable library, and must be a voluminous writer if we are to judge by his manuscripts, which filled many of the shelves: I do not believe, however, that he has as yet published any of his works.

On our entering the house he received us very cordially, and had cakes and wine placed before us; he then took us into his library, and among other curiosities showed us some parchment records, with seals attached, of the earliest bishops of Skalholt and Holum. Before our departure he insisted upon our taking a cup of coffee, which had been prepared for us while looking at his books, a custom universally observed towards visiters.

I was induced to ride over to Kialarness to see the site of the ancient heathen temple, very faint traces of which are at present visible. It is situated on the side of the bay opposite to Reikiavik, and the journey to it by land is twenty good miles, and at high water even more, as the mouths of several rivers have to

be crossed on the way. A range of mountains called Esian, about fifteen hundred feet high, rises almost perpendicular, leaving a plain of about two miles width between their foot and the sea. This strip of land is continued to the northward, till another bay called "Hvalfiord," or Whale frith, breaks off the connexion of Esiuberg, the name by which the plain is known, from Akrefield in Borgarfiord.

The land is fine pasturage, and at that time belonged to Biorn Stephenson, the secretary of the Lands-over-Rett, who died while I was in the country. He invited me in, and bade me join him at dinner; as this was the first time that I had dined with an Icelander, I was much struck at seeing his wife, who has the title of "Fru," or Lady, assisting her servant-girls in laying the table, at which she placed no cover for herself. She presently brought in a joint and other dishes, but did not sit down herself; she continued her attentions during the meal, changing the plates, and when dinner was

over removed the dishes and brought in the coffee. However disconsonant to our feelings this custom may be, it bears the marks of the greatest antiquity, and is observed in every thorough Icelandic house.

With such short trips round the country I managed to kill the time for the first month; but I am afraid that after the beginning of October the time would have hung very heavy on my hands, particularly when there was an almost total absence of daylight, had there not been a library kept over the chancel of the church. The collection was originally begun at Copenhagen, and it owes its existence principally to voluntary contributions, and to the aid of the King of Denmark, who has presented to it several very valuable Danish works. At present, though it is not easy to be exact as to the number, owing to the little order observed in their arrangement, there cannot be fewer than from four to five thousand volumes. As may be expected, the majority are Danish and

Icelandic; next to these the English works surpass those in any other language in value and number. Most of the classics, both Latin and Greek, are to be found; and a good number of German, together with a sprinkling of Swedish, French, and Italian books complete the catalogue. The English portion has at different times been sent by some learned society in London, but which it was I was unable to discover; it contains some valuable histories, travels, and many religious and miscellaneous works. Once a week the governor's secretary attends for an hour in the middle of the day, and persons are allowed to carry away any number of books upon leaving a receipt for them. Occasionally half a dozen persons presented themselves, and took away a volume or two; but a very large proportion of the books in foreign languages which I perused, bore evident marks of not having seen the light since their arrival in their new country; and when I restored them to their places on the dusty shelves,

I could not help reflecting on the long repose which they would enjoy before they were again awakened by some future traveller.

A ship is engaged every year at Copenhagen by the government, to convey official papers and letters to Iceland at the commencement of winter. This vessel is bound to leave Elsinore on the first of October, and after landing the mail at Reikiavik, it is laid up till the month of March in a creek of the bay of Havnifiord, where it remains frozen up. Though this voyage is always attended with very bad weather, it is remarkable that only one vessel has been lost on it for the last twelve years. The principal danger is the approaching the coast in November, when the shortness of daylight, and thickness of fogs that hang round the island, make the trip extremely perilous. From the end of October every one was on the look-out at Reikiavik for this ship, which is the most welcome that reaches their shores. Day after day the people were to be seen climbing, with

telescopes in their hands, to a slight eminence which commands a view of Faxèfiord, and straining their eyes to descry the wished-for sail on the horizon, which did not gratify their expectations till the middle of November. She had been seven weeks on the passage, which was by no means one of uncommon length.

The news of he rarrival spread like wildfire, every body was in a state of restlessness, and each person I met repeated the intelligence which I had heard a hundred times within an hour. Even the morning after, as I was standing on the beach, looking at the solitary galliot rocking violently in the harbour, two or three Icelanders could not refrain from pointing her out to me, and announcing her arrival. The chests which contained the correspondence of the whole island, were hurried on shore, and carried to the government house to be distributed. The tide now turned in that quarter, and every one was seen rushing out with letters and every variety of countenance. Of the

latter I unfortunately was not one, from some mistake in the direction of those addressed to me; and when I attempted to get some information concerning the general state of Europe, the only news that I could extract from the captain, was the death of the Emperor of Austria.

In a few days the ship had discharged her cargo and sailed, to take possession of her winter quarters at Havnifiord. The usual dulness again resumed its sway till Christmas, when the severity of the weather increased and the darkness became almost total. These did not, however, prevent the Danish enjoying themselves and keeping the festival; and the king's birthday, which followed soon after, gave them another opportunity of dissipating the gloom peculiar to the season of the year.

Flags were hoisted on every house belonging to a merchant, and even the little wooden windmill outside the town was ornamented with the national colours. Preparations were made

for a public dinner which was to be followed by a ball, at which all persons in office were to be present. The dinner began at four and was very good, considering the difficulty of procuring materials. Soup, flanked by pieces of beef and mutton, and followed by swans, wild ducks, and ptarmigans, formed the principal ingredients of the feast, which was washed down with numerous bottles of champagne, which put the company in the best possible humour. Before the entertainment was concluded, copies of a song composed for the occasion by one of the party were handed round, and the whole table joined in chorus.

About nine o'clock the tables were cleared and the dancing began. The *locale* consisted of two low rooms, and a smaller one between them in which punch was imbibed copiously by the male part of the company, while the next in size was occupied by the ladies, who were as busily employed in drinking coffee and talking scandal—for scandal has reached even this

distant spot. The largest apartment, illuminated with about fifty candles, was reserved for dancing. This consisted of what they were pleased to call English country-dances, though as I am not a frequenter of balls, I cannot answer for its resembling any thing of the sort in our country. There was much running up and down, and clapping one another's hands, and the heat produced by the exercise, soon became visible on the faces of those who joined in the pastime. Later in the evening there was waltzing, though the music elicited from two violins and a drum, which represented the band, was not favourable to that kind of movement, and, added to the confined space for action, produced nothing but jostling. Those who did not join in the dance, went up into the loft and passed their time in smoking cigars and playing at the eternal Ombre, in a place probably only a few degrees hotter than an oven, and continued there with the greatest persever-

ance, till five in the morning, when the party broke up. At neither this nor any subsequent dancing-party, did I see any woman present who habitually wore the national costume. Their cloth "trejas," fastened tight up to the chin, and their lofty head-dress, are so ponderous that they soon make dancing more a labour than an amusement.

The rigour of the weather continued unabated during the four following months. Storms were of daily occurrence; at one time the sea made a clear breach into the town; at another the wind surpassed even its usual violence, and lifted the boats off the beach. Windows of houses distant a quarter of a mile and even more from the sea, were darkened with salt spray. The sea repeatedly froze near the shores; but, in exposed situations, the force of the waves broke it up and strewed the beach with masses of salt ice. Most, however, of the bays that were sheltered from the wind

remained fast. That between Reikiavik and Bessestad might be crossed on horseback where it was six miles wide.

During the month of February, the thermometer several times fell ten degrees below zero at Reikiavik, and within twelve miles from it in the interior, the mercury had fallen several degrees lower. I had my coffee freeze one morning in the saucer while I was drinking it out of the cup, and this happened in a very small room with a stove full of fire. (I have since been in North America, and though the cold indicated by the thermometer was greater than in Iceland, the frost was far more sensible in the latter country.) The lowest that I have ever seen the thermometer was in Quebec, when the mercury fell thirty-two degrees below zero; and, though I have never seen it by many degrees so low in Iceland, I can remember many occasions when the cold has appeared to me far more intense. I account for this difference by the serenity of the weather in Canada, and the

awful gales that never cease to blow in Iceland. Often have I been obliged to turn back, finding it useless to attempt to urge my horse against the wind. He was, in fact, unable to stem the storm, which in an instant covered him with icicles and froze the stirrups to my boots.

The force of hail is not to be compared to that of snow, when driving on a comparatively mild day in Iceland. Many exposed spots of ground are left bare the whole winter, and in others hills are formed, that cover every thing in the shape of houses. On two occasions, when returning home I have found my entrance quite put out of the question, by the whole front being snowed up to the roof; windows, door, every thing had disappeared, and all in the course of an hour.

I have no doubt, but this will be deemed an exaggeration, and that many will question the possibility of existing in such a climate; all I can answer is, that the winter I passed in Iceland was considered the severest there had been for

half a century. For the last twenty years the winters had been particularly mild, as, I believe, has been the case in Europe. It seemed it was intended to balance the advantages derived by the people from good weather, by the extraordinary rigour of this winter. This, the majority had strongly impressed upon them, by the great loss they suffered in the death of their cattle. Many were obliged to kill several of their horses; even the bishop, who was probably as well supplied with forage as any farmer, was necessitated to have nine of his slaughtered, for want of food to give them. The winter was even protracted beyond its usual limits, and upon no day in the summer that followed it, did I feel as much heat as in the month of November, on my return to England.

If, however, the days were gloomy, their dreariness was in some measure compensated for by the brilliancy of the nights. I had, some years before, witnessed the Aurora Borealis in the Orkney Isles, and had been struck with its

beauty, yet its partial light in that quarter could bear no comparison with the splendour it assumes in Iceland. There its brightness pervades the whole expanse of the sky, and fills it with a stream of ever-varying colours. During frosty weather it is visible every night, giving even more light than the moon, and it has the additional charm of being continually changing. It is perpetually melting into new forms, and presenting every variety of hue that the eye can fancy; it has, alternately, blue and green mixed with its prevailing pink, which imperceptibly fades into yellow, and as gradually revives and becomes a bright flame-colour.

By the 1st of March, the post-ship reappeared at Reikiavik, and waited only for some letters from the north of the island to return to Denmark. After some days' delay, the men charged with them arrived in a most pitiable state. They had been fourteen days on the way, and had undergone the greatest privations. In crossing the mountains, the cold had been

so intense, as to strip the whole of the skin off their faces; their fingers and toes were so much injured, that they expected to lose several of them, and yet these men were preparing to leave Reikiavik on the delivery of the mail, to enter on a life equally laborious and hazardous. The fishing season had commenced in the south, and they had started before their companions and carried the letters for the paltry remuneration of about fifty shillings. Nothing now delayed the departure of the ship, except the ice that had bound the harbour, when luckily a strong breeze parted it, and in fourteen days she was at anchor in Copenhagen.

CHAPTER X.

Cod-fishery — Arrival of a French corvette — Warm spring at Langain—A leper

THE commencement of the cod-fishery relieved the monotony that reigned every where, and even gave some animation to the town. Peasants were daily arriving from the interior to man the numerous boats that covered the beach; the merchants and their agents were more than usually diffuse on piscatory matters, and estafettes were continually going and coming with intelligence from Kieblivik. For the first two

or three days the news were favourable, the boats had returned loaded with fish, and every thing raised expectations of a most capital season. Nevertherless, before the week was over, all these delusive hopes vanished; the weather changed, and remained steadily bad; the boats were unable to put to sea more than three days in six, and when they did, their nets were carried away or damaged by the storm. The conversation then took a different turn, and each talked of what was due to him by the fishermen, and discussed the chances of his getting paid.

The fishery is principally carried on in the west, and is sufficiently extensive to give employment to many farmers and labourers from Nordland and Osterland, independent of the regular Soe Bondè, or sea peasants. Both Breidè and Faxè Fiords swarm with fish, but altogether the northern coast of Gulbringè Syssell, from Havnifiord to Kieblivik, is the most productive part, and it is consequently

crowded from March to May with boats from all parts. For the cod-fishery two different-sized boats are used in this district which is usually called the Strand The name of the smaller is Boad, it holds two men, and the larger class, termed Skip, requires a crew of six. Both kinds are rigged for sailing, which they do pretty well when right before the wind. They are long and narrow, with a high stem and stern, and altogether are allowed to be good sea-boats.

Immediately on their arrival at the fishing places, the peasants engage to serve in the boats, and the owners select out of each crew a "formadr," whose business it is to summon the men when the weather admits of their going out, and who commands at sea. It is usual for the peasants to bring but little provisions along with them, as, while they remain fishing, their principal food consists of the heads of the fish, which are separated from the bodies immediately on landing them. In places like Kieb-

livik, where the merchants are the chief owners of boats, they have built several houses capable of containing from twenty-four to fifty men each. They are long stone hovels, with berths along the walls, and the same distribution in the loft. Though the wind finds admission in every corner through the loose stones, the men, though drenched by remaining at sea the whole day, seem no way affected by the cold and wet, and are satisfied with a blanket and a little hay for bedding.

The boats continue at sea twelve and eighteen hours together when the weather is at all favourable, and, during that time, the crews do not taste a particle of food. They merely provide themselves with a small keg of vallè, a kind of fermented whey, which they find well adapted for cutting the thirst. With a view of keeping as dry as possible, they wear sheepskin dresses over their ordinary clothes, and, by continually smearing them with train oil, they succeed in rendering them somewhat waterproof, though

the benefit derived by this precaution is not great, as the majority of those employed in fishing are subject to rheumatism, and premature decay is visible in almost all. They appear to be more careful of their hands, and will neither row nor haul in their lines without mittens, which are remarkable for having two thumbs. By this contrivance they are able to turn the side against the palm when saturated with wet, and have the dry part against their fingers. As they carry a dozen or two of these mittens out every day, they are thus enabled to preserve their hands against chafing and chill. By the end of the fishing season they become shrunk, and, being too stiff, are sold for a trifle for exportation.

The partition of the fish depends upon the mode of taking it. When hooks are used, the day's produce is portioned out into eight shares. The formádr divides the whole as equally as possible, and the rest draw lots for their portions. After the six fishermen have been satis-

fied, the two remaining shares go to the owner of the boat, one for the use of the skip, and the other for providing hooks and lines. In the smaller boats the two fishermen and the owner have each a third. « When nets have been supplied instead of lines, the shares are increased to twelve, and one half of the whole belongs to the owner. In the Westman Isles, larger vessels, carrying from eight to ten men, are employed, and some few of this kind are used at Reikiavik for taking "haukall," a kind of black shark, eight or ten feet long, from which a considerable quantity of train-oil is drawn.

Towards the end of April, great anxiety began to be felt for the arrival of ships from Denmark, and, in the following month, we were again cheered with the sight of ships which entered the harbour in twos and threes of a day. The wooden jetties were again lowered from the places to which they had been drawn up during the winter, and every one not employed in the

fishery, as well as most of the women, were busy helping to discharge the ships.

We had entered upon summer, which had begun in the middle of April, the Icelandic calendar dividing the year only into summer and winter. The snow had begun to melt, and had flooded the town, yet the frost remained on the ground till the month of July. The shortest day had been of rather less than three hours duration; and about Christmas, the influence of the sun was so weak as scarcely to give more than twilight. The Icelanders do not reckon the time of day by hours, but by watches of three hours each. Hactei and Midnat denote those that end at twelve o'clock in the day and at night; and the other divisions are called Otta, which follows midnight, Dagmoul, Midmogen; Noon, which is from midday to three in the afternoon, Mid-after, and Natmoul.

In the month of May, the occasional appearance of a tolerably bright day, gave indications of the approach of summer, though the advance

of the season was much checked by the drift-ice from Greenland, which began to surround the island.

Among the first arrivals appeared a French corvette. The sensation caused by this unexpected visiter was great, but, unfortunately, there happened to be no one in the town but myself that could speak French; I was, therefore, requested by Mr. Finson, the governor, to interpret for him.

In the morning the captain came ashore, and announced that he had been sent by his government, to make inquiries concerning the loss of a man-of-war brig, called La Lilloise, that had been employed in protecting the French fishing-vessels in those seas, and had not been heard of for three years. Every inquiry had been made without success; and, as the last place where she had been seen with certainty was near Vapnifiord in Osterland, it was conjectured that she must have foundered near Iceland, or about the ice that obstructs the

coast of Old Greenland. Another ship had been before sent in search of her, and considerable interest for her fate having been manifested in France, it had been deemed advisable to satisfy public feeling by fitting out a second expedition.

The present ship, which was named La Recherche, from the nature of her mission, had undergone such changes in Cherbourg, as would fit her for her present voyage. She was entirely double planked, and was well calculated to resist any slight pressure from the ice. With a view also of making her as manageable as possible, she had been sent out with only four carronades, instead of her whole complement. She brought with her two physicians, who were ordered by the French government to travel over Iceland, and bring back an account of the natural curiosities of the country. One of them had already made a voyage round the world, in the capacity of naturalist of the Astrolabe, which Charles X. sent to the South Seas in search of La Perouse.

One important point, however, had been neglected, for neither officer nor man could speak any but his native tongue. The men had been pressed at Dunkirk from among the seamen who fish on the coast of Iceland, and some pretended to be able to speak the language of the country fluently; yet, upon one whom they pointed out as their best linguist, being questioned by Mr. Finson, in Icelandic, he did not understand a word of what the latter said; and in his turn addressed him in a jargon in use between the Dutch fishermen and the natives. At first the Frenchman looked rather blank at his discomfiture, but immediately recovering from his confusion walked away, declaring that his antagonist could not speak his native language.

A few days after their arrival, I accompanied the captain and the *savans* to the bishop's house, of whom they made inquiry respecting a priest in Westerland, who had casually said, that a Dutch skipper had told him, that he had

seen La Lilloise founder in Breidè Fiord. As this intelligence, though vague, might be a clue to some discovery, the bishop gave them a letter to Jon Sivertson, the priest, requesting him to give the French officers all the information in his possession concerning the matter.

About this time one of my brothers arrived at Reikiavik, and, as the time was very limited that he could remain with me, I was desirous of getting horses immediately to take him to the Geyser. Every one to whom I mentioned my intention, tried to dissuade me from attempting what might be impossible, and certainly would be attended with many difficulties at that early period of the year. The winter was hardly ended in the interior, the thawing of the snow would render many places impassable, and above all, I was told we should find the greatest difficulty in getting hay.

I therefore gave up at once the idea of entering on such an arduous journey, and we spent the following days in accompanying the

two naturalists in their excursions. One of them determined on giving a dinner on shore to the principal people of the town, and to the officers of La Recherche before she left Reikiavik for Westerland.' Much of what was wanted was to be had on board, still fresh provisions would be required, and all that the cook could be supplied with, were the hind-quarters of a calf, not bigger than those of a grass lamb, from which anatomy might have been studied, the muscles being beautifully displayed and perfectly divested of any fat.

The "Chef" had been bent on astonishing the natives, and asked me how people could exist in such a country. He, however, after various shrugs of the shoulders set up a complete *batterie de cuisine*, and having lighted numerous *fourneaux* in the open air, to the imminent peril of the surrounding timber buildings, proceeded to dress a dinner that did infinite credit to his power of availing himself of every thing. The dinne-rparty consisted of about twenty guests,

among whom were the bishop and other magistrates of the land; and what with Danish, French, and a small quantity of French-latin, all were enabled to join in the conversation.

After the departure of the corvette, the naturalists established themselves on shore, and entered on their researches, the one applying himself to zoology and botany, and the other confining his attention to mineralogy. On one occasion, we accompanied them to the stream at Laugarn that gives the name to Reikiavik, and passed a whole day in trying its temperature in different places, and making experiments by boiling eggs in it. The stream itself is cold, and owes its heat to a spring rising out of a rock in the middle of it, which mixes with the rest of the water and raises its temperature almost to boiling. As it gets distant from the spring the water gradually cools till it flows into the bay, and in its course forms several pools in which the people of the town occasionally bathe. We found that an egg

upon being immersed in the hottest part, could be boiled in eight or ten minutes, according to the depth it was sunk to.

The difference of weather does not affect the temperature of the spring materially, but I have been informed that during heavy rains it is little more than lukewarm. The only purpose that it has been put to is to wash the clothes of the inhabitants of Reikiavik, and to turn a very small mill, the only one I saw in the island. A small timber house has been built close to the spring for the accommodation of those who come to wash, and in general it is to be found full the whole twenty-four hours together, as the distance between it and the town, with the morass to cross, renders it a troublesome business to go backwards and forwards. The course of the brook can be observed from afar by the smoke that skirts it, and the banks the whole way to the sea are covered with verdure, while the plain is still frozen over.

One of the objects that most excited the curi-

osity of the doctors, was a case of leprosy—the only one, I believe, in Reikiavik: we accordingly visited the unfortunate patient in the most miserable of the wretched hovels of the place. After groping through the dark, we came to a small apartment, partially lighted by the smallest possible window. We here found the poor man sitting up in a bed laid on a shelf against the gable over the door at which we entered. The placing him there must have given no little trouble, and it was clear that it was not intended to remove him alive from his present perch; for it could not be called any thing better. He was too horrible an object to look at; his face had almost lost every vestige of features, his eyes had quite disappeared, and most of his fingers and toes had dropped off.

Though he had been afflicted with this terrible scourge for eighteen years, it was only for the last three that the symptoms of his complaint had taken their more deadly appearance, and reduced him to the pitiable state in which

he will still linger some time. His intellect did not seem impaired, nor did he complain, except in very cold weather. In the same room were several beds, where his family lay; for, as leprosy is not considered contagious, but hereditary, by the Icelanders, they make no objection to the company of persons attacked with it.

This distressing disease is not uncommon in the country; and though I have never known but two cases, I have often been in houses where such persons were living; it was not, however, till afterwards that I became acquainted with the fact, as they dislike strangers to see them. The two Frenchmen, to whom, as physicians, no such objection could be made, told me they had seen as many as five-and-twenty, and that the case at Reikiavik was one of the mildest.

There are several kinds of this disease in Iceland, the most common of which is the one I saw; it is called in Icelandic Limafalsike, probably from the falling off of the extremities. Another sort, which covers the body

with horny scales, occurs, but is rare. The general name of the complaint is Spetalska, the same given for leprosy in their bible; it rarely attacks them before the age of forty, when the disease gradually creeps on till the whole flesh is vitiated, and the patient, after many years of loathsome suffering, sinks into the grave, of which he has long before appeared a tenant.

CHAPTER XI.

Journey to the Geysers — Thingvalle — Allmannagiaa — Hekla — Bruaraa.

We had given up all idea of seeing the Geysers, and my brother was waiting for the sailing of a ship to Liverpool, when, one morning, I was told that four horses were come for me from a clergyman at Kialarness for the journey. We lost no time in preparing for our departure; a few necessaries in the shape of bread and meat, and some bottles of spirits, were packed up in a pair of saddle-bags, and secured on the back of

one of our steeds. I had a horse which I bought on my first arrival; my brother and the clergyman's son, who was to accompany us, rode two others, and the fifth was allowed to follow loose as a reserve.

Our equipment was none of the smartest, as we had not the means of carrying more than a change of clothes with us. The difficulty we anticipated in procuring forage, made us limit, as much as possible, the number of our horses; and a blanket strapped over the saddle was the only luxury we allowed ourselves for sleeping on in a tent.

The weather, when we started, was by no means inviting; the wind was high, and rain fell in torrents; the way, however, was pretty good, and the distance to our first halting-place short. The word road would convey a wrong notion, for nothing worthy of that name is to be found in Iceland. Where the ground is rocky, a path is made by removing the stones, and this track is kept up by each farmer in the Hrepp giving

up a day in summer to the business of clearing it of any stones that have fallen into it. Where the land is swampy, little is done to make it passable, except occasionally a rude causeway is thrown over a few yards of the most dangerous part.

Half-an-hour's ride over a stony plain brought us to the first river we should have to cross. It is called the Lax-aa, or salmon river, and pronounced in Icelandic Laxow; at the ford it divides into three streams, each deep enough to cover a horse's legs, though at this time, from the partial melting of the snow, the current was increased in depth and rapidity. A little below the crossing-place are the salmon-leaps which have given the name to the river. The fishery belongs to the king, and is rented by two merchants in Reikiavik who have established a regular system of taking the fish at stated times. It would be well if the natives would follow their example, as streams producing salmon and trout are numerous all over the island; and it is

only the difficulty of transportation that deters the peasants from giving greater attention to this branch of industry than is necessary for their home consumption.

We continued our route along the coast up to the top of the bay of Reikiavik, and then turned our backs upon the sea, and proceeded to penetrate into the interior. The land improved as we receded from the coast; a few horses were to be seen here and there picking a few blades of last year's grass where a patch of ground was free from snow, which was rare enough, as we found on advancing that the season was much more backward than at Reikiavik. At last, we reached Mosfield, and were glad to conclude our first day's work at four, and escape from the rain which had fallen with scarce any intermission the whole day.

On alighting, we were conducted by Sire Benedict into his house. After having sat down a few minutes and drank the usual cup of coffee, the clergyman accompanied us to his church

which is contiguous to the parsonage. It had been lately rebuilt under his superintendence, and he seemed rather vain of the edifice, and perhaps with some reason, as it was far better than the generality of places of worship in his country; and yet it might easily have been mistaken for a small barn. The walls are of alternate layers of peat and stone, and Sire Benedict, after making exertions to get his parishioners to subscribe for a roof of boards, was driven to the necessity of contenting himself with covering the rafters with grass turf, as is usual for their houses. The gables are built of timber, tarred on the outside, but not ornamented with a tower, the solitary bell which summons the congregation being hung inside the church, close to the door. The distribution of the interior is like that of the church at Reikiavik, but on a much smaller scale, as the length of the whole is less than twenty feet. The position of the pulpit in the screen which divides the chancel from the rest of the church, gives an opportunity to the pastor

of addressing both the men and women, who are separated; the absence also of a loft is a great improvement, as besides being a receptacle for chests and rustic instruments, it generally makes the ceiling so low, as to prevent the clergyman from standing upright in the pulpit, even when it is raised but two feet from the floor.

The altar is a mere wooden cupboard, surrounded by a slight rail of the same material, with a small window on each side. When officiating, the priest wears over his cloth gown a white surplice with a crimson stole, down the back of which a cross of gold lace is sewn, similar to that used by the Roman Catholic clergy. At other times the priesthood are not distinguished from the laity by their dress, except perhaps by being more shabby in their appearance.

The guest-room into which we were shown was a low wainscoted apartment, unpainted, with two diminutive windows; but the depth of

the wall prevented them giving much light, and the absence of any sort of fireplace, at which to take off the chill of our drenched clothes, rendered the place by no means comfortable. On one side, an opening in the wainscot showed a recess entirely occupied by a bed, the whole furniture of which consisted of a couple of brown blankets that might have been taken for dirty horse-rugs. We crept with some difficulty into this crib, and, bidding stern defiance to its numerous tenants, spent three or four hours in trying to get asleep, a matter of no small difficulty, which we at last succeeded in, notwithstanding the continual noise overhead, and the rank odours that pervaded the house.

Next morning, having got over all the difficulties of starting incidental to Icelandic travelling, by nine o'clock, we proceeded to the nearest farm, where we fed our horses, for Sire Benedict's stock of hay was so reduced by the hardness of the winter, that our beasts had been obliged to begin the march on empty

stomachs. We also loaded the spare horse with a truss of hay, and crept along sometimes in swamps, at others in the beds of rivers. The snow was deep, and thawing rapidly, so that we were soon obliged to abandon our horses, and drive them before us in the rain which fell in torrents. As there was no track, we found the greatest difficulty in keeping them together, and drag them out of holes into which they were every instant floundering up to their necks. We proceeded in this way for six hours before we caught a glimpse of the Lake of Thingvalle after which we had the consolation to know that the worst part of our day's journey was over. A rapid descent down an almost perpendicular hill, brought us close to the water's edge, along which we were enabled to gallop a few miles on good ground towards the stupendous ravine called Almannagiaa.

The whole plain of Thingvalle appears to have been subjected to volcanic eruptions of even more than usual violence. Surrounded by

lofty mountains on every side but that which is washed by the lake, and rent in every direction with fissures of immense depth, it gives the mind, more than any other spot in Iceland, a conception of the extent of subterraneous fire, ready, at any moment, to convert the island into a chaos. It presents a scene that would require the pencil of Martin to do justice to it, and would furnish an idea for the picture of those dreary and awful regions into which the rebellious angels were hurled after their defeat.

Besides numerous inferior rents, the plain is effectually separated from the surrounding country on the east and west by two parallel chasms that run through its whole length. The western, and most considerable, is called Almannagiaa, a name given to it, according to the clergyman of Thingvalle, in the earlier periods of the Icelandic republic, from its being an object of universal attraction to those that came to the Althing. For more than three miles the ground has either sunk or been torn asunder, so

as to leave a chasm a hundred and five feet wide, which runs in a straight line the whole way. The effect is much increased by the whole being disclosed at once to the sight of the traveller, as, on making a sharp turn among some rocks, he beholds a green way enclosed between two natural walls more than a hundred feet below him.

The descent at first appears impossible, for, though the rocks at the extremity of the fissure at which the spectator stands, have formed a kind of staircase, it approaches so nearly to the perpendicular, that a stranger would deny the possibility of a man ascending or descending, much more that of a loaded horse; yet, on dismounting, he will see these animals walk down without the least encouragement. I have heard of persons descending on horseback, but the danger of the beast missing his footing, unless left to his own guidance, is so great, that I should much doubt any one in his senses attempting any thing of the kind.

Upon reaching the bottom we found ourselves on a flat green surface with a perpendicular wall one hundred and eight feet high on our left hand, and on our right one about forty, leaning considerably outwards. Many large fragments of stone which had fallen from the higher side, were lying scattered in the bottom, and several more of grotesque shapes, standing loose in the hollows of the rock, seemed ready to follow them with the least gust of wind.

After riding about a furlong in the ravine, we turned out of it by an opening in its right side, and entered the plain of Thingvalle. In a few minutes we stood on the banks of the Oxeraa, which after falling in a beautiful cascade from the higher side of Almannagiaa, and continuing its course along it for a short distance, escapes by another opening. The river then separating into two channels, forms the small island on which criminals were formerly executed, and finally loses itself in the lake.

The Oxeraa, though fordable in summer, was

now so swollen, that it was considered advisable to transport our baggage and saddles in a boat. The clergyman of the place rowed to us in a little skiff and ferried us over. This he managed to do by letting the boat drop down the stream obliquely, while our guide swam the horses across a wider part where the current was somewhat less strong.

We examined several caves in the neighbourhood, and found that almost all the fissures ran in the same direction as at Almannagiaa. Most of the narrow clefts are filled with beautifully clear water which reaches within six or seven feet of the surface, and have an underground communication with the lake. A large sort of trout, called Foreller, which abounds in the latter, is caught in great numbers in the holes.

In the morning, while the horses were being saddled, we had a look into the church. In style, it resembles that at Mosfield, but is the most diminutive place of worship I ever recollect being in, and was, moreover, crowded with

chests and piles of stockfish belonging to the priest; a custom, as I remarked elsewhere very common among the Icelanders, who consider it no desecration to put a church to such a use, and make no objection to strangers taking up their lodging in it when they cannot offer them a place in their houses. The one at Thingvalle is not only remarkable for being one of the smallest in the country, but also for a tree which has taken root inside it, and, after passing through the wall, rises to the height of about fifteen feet, and entirely overshadows the entrance. It is the tallest tree that we saw in Iceland, and was pointed out to me as a curiosity. I have been told, however, that at Eyefiord in Nordland, a dozen are to be found that have arrived at the stupendous height of twenty feet.

One of our horses having lost a shoe, the clergyman replaced it with one which he had made the day before. At first, a priest doing such a piece of work appears strange to our notions of clerical dignity; but we must bear in

mind that in all domestic matters the Icelandic priesthood are on a par with the peasantry. On my former trip to the Geysers, I had found the priest busily employed with his son in the smithy teaching him how to make horse-shoe nails; and I suppose it was finding some other member of the same profession employed in like manner that made a traveller assert, that the clergy in Iceland are not only all farriers, but also the best in the land. I cannot deny that the personal appearance of Sire Biorn, of Thingvalle, might have led a stranger to take him for a journeyman blacksmith, and one too who was not paid the highest wages. His long black hair and beard of a fortnight's growth were by no means set off by an antique blue jacket and trousers; yet, upon further acquaintance, it was easy to perceive by his conversation that he was a man of education and considerable learning.

A second ravine, called "Hrapnagiaa," or the Chasm of Ravens, which, though not so formi-

dable in appearance, is perhaps more difficult of passage than Almannagiaa, forms the other key to Thingvalle Sveit, as it is called. As we ascended, after leaving it, into the passes between the mountains, we had a beautiful view of the lake with its lofty islands of Sandey and Nesey, with the waterfall of the Oxeraa in the distance. The weather had become more favourable, and, as we jogged along, our way was enlivened by numberless ducks that sought the lake, and occasionally by the flutter of ptarmigans, that were so tame as scarce to move out of our track.

Before beginning our descent into the plain of Laugar Valle, we stopped a few minutes at a curious volcanic crater called Tin Tron, which presents the perfect form of a chimney-top, about fifteen feet aboveground. The orifice is much reddened by the effect of fire; and though not more than sufficient to admit a man, it gradually widens into a large cavern. Upon

reaching this spot, Mount Hekla bursts at once into sight. Though the most famed, it is one of the least of the "Jokuls" or mountains of Iceland; of those whose heights are ascertained, Snœfield Jokul and Eyefiall both dispute the palm, and it is probable that many in the interior surpass both these mountains by some hundred of feet. The summit of Hekla is reckoned to be four thousand three hundred feet above the level of the sea, while that of Snœfield Jokul is upwards of four thousand five hundred. Though the eruptions of Hekla have been the most frequent (it having had ten since the colonization of the island), other volcanoes have caused far greater devastation. In the last great eruption of 1783, Hekla took no part; the mountains in the neighbourhood of Skaptaa were then the principal Jokuls in action. Though the recorded eruptions are numerous, it is probable that by far the most terrible convulsions of nature, and those that have most

tended to change the face of the country, had taken place before it was known to the Norwegians.

Laugar Valle presents a more tame appearance than the plain we left behind us; but it is far more valuable, as the pasturage is good and the Lichen Icelandicus abounds in most parts of it. On our right we had another sheet of water called Apu Vatn, along the shore of which were visible long columns of smoke arising from boiling fountains. In the afternoon we entered Efstadal, and concluded our third day's journey within a few miles of the Geysers. We stopped for the night at the Hreppstiore's house, which were our best quarters since we left Reikiavik. His wife, Helga, with whom I was already acquainted, brought us some boiled mutton, and made us as comfortable as was in her power. The feast that she set before us was the more welcome as we feared that our provisions might run short, if too much broken in upon before our arrival at our destination, and we

well knew that it might be next to impossible to procure a further stock. We had the additional comfort of finding ourselves in a clean house; and, after spending the remainder of the day in climbing the mountains, at the foot of which the farm lay, of retiring to rest in a decent room.

Our horses had not fared better than ourselves, and they now began to show that the work was too hard for them, after being starved the whole winter. We had already left one at Laugar Valle, and another was so knocked up on arriving at Efstadal that we determined on leaving him there till our return, and hiring another to take us to the Geysers. The road improved as we advanced, and gave us an opportunity of cantering over the dry plains between Efstadal and the river Bruaraa. We had here to cross a waterfall of very peculiar form. The cascade is broken in the middle by a cleft in the rock about fifteen feet wide, by which the greatest body of water is directed towards the

centre, as in the case of the horseshoe fall at Niagara. Over this opening there formerly existed a natural bridge, whence the river got its name; a lady who lived at Skalholt, however, disliking the facility it gave to travellers of coming to that place, was selfish enough to cause the arch to be broken down, little foreseeing that she would be drowned at a later period in crossing this very spot. For many years after, every one was obliged to cross half a mile below the fall in boats, till a wooden frame was placed across this kind of sluice. On coming to the bank at the edge of the fall, we forced our horses through the river to the platform, and then into the stream again till we reached the opposite side. The greatest care must be taken as the depth varies from two to four and five feet, and the rapidity of the current is apt to frighten young horses, who will often stop at the most critical part and refuse to cross the frame. This hesitation on the part of the

horse is sure to put his rider's life in great jeopardy, and, should the animal be restive, nothing will save his being taken off his legs, and swept down a fall of fifty feet.

About two miles lower down is a ferry, at a place called Spoastader, where all travellers cross, on their way from the west to Skalholt. This spot was, in the fifteenth century, the scene of an outrage, not unlike those of Lynch law, in practice in these days in some parts of America; and as it exhibits a contrast to the usual veneration for the clergy in those times, I will here insert the account of it given by a descendant of the principal actor in it.

John Gerrichson, who is stated by some to have been by birth a Dane, was Provost of Westeras, in Sweden; and, in 1409, was made Archbishop of Upsala, by Eric, of Pomerania, king of the three Northern kingdoms of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. The appointment produced great discontent, particularly as the new prelate, before long, was guilty of various of-

fences. Among other charges of a disgraceful nature, one of peculation to the amount of 20,000 ducats was brought against him, and so bad was his general conduct that he was deposed, and even the Pope consented to his removal from his see. After his degradation, he retired to Denmark. At a later period, the Swedes gave his appointment to the see of Upsala, as a reason for their revolting against Eric. Unable to advance his favourite at home, the king made him afterwards Bishop of Skalholt, in Iceland. He accordingly sailed thither in 1421 from England, where he had collected thirty men, principally Irishmen, who were to act as his body-guard. Under the protection of these bravoes, he travelled about his bishopric, plundering and committing various acts of violence. Emboldened by his success, he sent men to seize two rich landowners, Teit Gunlogson, of Bjarnanes in Osterland, and Thorward Löftson, of Mödrevalle in Nordland, and to bring them to Skalholt. They were there

put in irons, confined in a dark dungeon, and forced to do the work of the meanest slaves. During the autumn, however, Thorward contrived, through some unknown means, to effect his escape. The next year at Easter, during the festivities, the jailers shared so largely in the general drunkenness, as to forget or lose their keys. A servant-girl found them and brought them to the remaining prisoner, who thus escaped and returned home. For this service Teit rewarded his deliverer with a good farm, and helped her to make an advantageous marriage.

Both the peasants being now at liberty, entered into a correspondence, the object of which was to obtain revenge, not only for the harsh treatment which both had suffered, but also to chastise the bishop for a still greater indignity inflicted on Thorward's wife. The following circumstances also urged them on in their project.

A short time before these occurrences, one

Magnus, connected with the bishop's body-guard and supposed to be his son, made love to Margrete, a young and handsome lady, the daughter of Vigfus Holm, a noble Norwegian, at that time Lehnshövding of Iceland, but met with a decided repulse. The villain revenged himself by attacking Kirkebol, a farm in Gulbringe Syssel, where Margrete resided with her brother Ivar Holm. The latter was slain and the house set on fire. The damsel, however, escaped from the burning pile through an oven in the bath-room. Under cover of the smoke and the darkness of the night, she quitted the farm unperceived, threw herself on an almost unbroken colt, and thus gave her pursuers the slip. Having reached Oedfiord in Nordland, she made a solemn vow to marry the man who should avenge her brother's death and the violence offered to herself. The murderer and incendiary, Magnus, fled the country immediately after perpetrating this act. Thorward, however, determined to visit his crime on the heads of his

accomplices, and thus at the same time to do himself justice, and gain the reward offered by Margrete.

In furtherance of their plan, Thorward and Teit agreed to meet at Skalholt, at the feast of St. Thorlak, which occurs on the 20th of July, as they considered it certain that the bishop would be at home at that time, for it was usual for him to officiate himself in the cathedral on this holiday, which was kept solemn throughout the island; nor were they disappointed in their expectations. When the time came, they each brought with them a large troop of powerful and well-armed men. The bishop was standing at the high altar, with the chalice and holy wafer in his hands, surrounded by priests in full pontificals, when notice was given him of his enemies being in the neighbourhood. He instantly felt that his end was not far off, and that there was little hope of mercy from those whom he had so cruelly ill-treated; he, however, attempted to defend himself by

having the doors of the church closed. So slight an obstacle did not long retard the conspirators; attacking the doors with great violence, they soon made them give way. Fifty of the most daring, led on by Arne Magnusson, a peasant from Nordland, rushed into the church in complete armour; they flew on the bishop, and dragged him from the altar, notwithstanding the endeavours of the priests, who clung to him and tried to hold him back. In the middle of the cathedral the holy wafer fell from his hand, and the parish priest, throwing himself on the ground, took it up in his mouth. When arrived at the church-tower, the bishop and his persecutors stopped a while, and he asked for some drink; one of his attendants was despatched to procure him what he asked for, and returned with a silver cup filled with old mead, which Gerrichson drained to the bottom. This done, they removed him, while he implored them to save his life; a request

they had little intention of complying with. His episcopal habit was brought to him, and his guards and servants sought every where, as well in the church as the houses in Skalholt. The treatment these men received took away all hopes from the bishop, for they were cut down and shot in various ways.

Gerrichson himself was reserved for a different fate; carried to the ferry of the Bruaraa, he was put into a sack with a heavy stone fastened to it, thrown into the river, and in a few minutes drowned. The conspirators then quietly returned each to his own home, and, strange to tell, not one of them was subjected to any legal prosecution, nor did any person attempt to punish the murder of the bishop and his many attendants, or the foul desecration of the church and feast. At that period anarchy prevailed in Denmark, as well as in Iceland; indeed, the whole of the three northern kingdoms were nearly in the same lawless state. Eric of Po-

merania's wars with his vassals and subjects, left him no time to attend to the more insignificant broils of the Icelanders, and his former favourite was left unavenged—a fate not altogether undeserved. His misdeeds in Iceland, and the infamy of his character before he came there, might in those days, perhaps, have palliated the crime of his murderers, and many, no doubt, considered "his taking off" a benefit conferred on the country; the common people, however, believed that those who assisted at this tragedy were all visited with various judgments by Heaven. The catholics abroad even attempted to raise him to the rank of a saint or a martyr. He was buried in the middle of the church, in the spot where the host fell from his hands; and the bodies of the Irishmen whom he had brought over were deposited in the neighbourhood of Skalholt, in a place called to this day, from that circumstance, "Iragerde."

Shortly after his return home, Thorward Löft-

son claimed the hand of Margrete, who kept her promise and married him. They both lived in undisturbed peace and happiness, and became the ancestors of a numerous and yet unextinguished progeny.

CHAPTER XII.

_The Great Geyser—The Strokr.

THE Geysers are situated in the valley of Haukadal, on a table land slightly elevated, and chiefly formed of loose stones and incrustations, thinly covered with mould. The spot in which the springs are clustered together is, though in the middle of a swamp, remarkably dry, and only partially covered with grass. If all the pools and jets be reckoned, I doubt whether they would fall short of one hundred and fifty;

and when we consider that they are all contained within the space of about twenty acres of ground, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that the whole place is a crust, covering a boiler with numberless safety-valves; and the communication between the springs, is rendered more probable, by an increased agitation frequently affecting the whole number simultaneously.

The first object that presents itself is a shallow stream, fed by the overflowing of a pool of unfathomable depth, which has the power of incrusting whatever is left in its current. Even its bed has undergone this process, and might be mistaken for white cement, as well as various woollen stockings and mittens that have been left there purposely. Passing by this stream and the New Geyser, we pitched our tent between the latter and the Great Geyser. This new domicile was inconveniently small, being but four feet high, and supported on three staves, little longer than ordinary walking-sticks.

When our saddles and great-coats had been deposited inside, there was just sufficient room for three of us to sit in it with our feet outside. Yet I doubt whether a larger tent would have served us better; for though so low, we had the greatest difficulty in preventing its being every minute blown over, by heaping stones on the pegs that had no firm hold in the ground.

The principal fountain, the Great Geyser, is at the extremity of the eminence, and is a little more elevated than the rest of the ground. On every side but that near to the New Geyser, the descent is precipitous, and from the loose incrustations that cover it, perfectly inaccessible. The basin resembles a shallow bowl, gradually deepening to the orifice of the pipe in the centre, where it reaches the depth of three feet. Its form would be circular but for an indentation in its circumference, which reduces its prevailing diameter of fifty-six feet to forty-six at this part. The pipe, as low as the eye can discern, is perfectly round, and about twelve feet across.

I have been told, that its depth has been ascertained to be more than sixty feet, a measurement that must have been attended with much difficulty, and a little uncertainty, from the disturbance of the boiling water.

When we arrived, the basin was full of water, with a little running down the side by which we approached it. Two hours after, we felt a slight shaking of the ground, and on rushing out of the tent, we saw the water of the Great Geyser, elevated about forty feet. When it had continued about five minutes in a state of eruption, the water sank into the pipe and left the basin bare. Two or three minutes sufficed to dry it perfectly, and we were able to walk into it, with no other inconvenience than the heat of the bottom, which penetrated very sensibly through the soles of our shoes. The north wind, however, which was blowing with great violence, rapidly lowered the temperature of the stone, and the surface assumed a light gray colour. In the middle it is comparatively

smooth, and but slightly granulated, like frost-work; but on the outside and edge protuberances abound, which have much the character of heads of cauliflower. On the removal of any of these excrescences by a slight blow of the hammer, the spot from which they have been detached presents a surface analogous to, but somewhat rougher than, that of the interior of the basin.

The water gradually rose in the pipe after the explosion, and at the end of four hours was so high as to run over. A slight bubbling was perceptible in the middle, where the heat was greatest, and a thick smoke, accompanied by a sulphureous smell, shrouded the whole pool, which, but for its beautiful transparency, might have reminded one of the Stygian lake. Various indications were given by it of a second eruption, by the water occasionally being disturbed, and alternately rising and falling; yet, with the exception of one jet, from

four to five feet high, this Geyser remained quiet during the night.

The year before, I had witnessed a far more beautiful eruption of the great Geyser. It was of more than ten minutes' duration, and presented a column, or rather pyramid of, at least, ninety feet in height. The day happened to be calm, and consequently the jet was not broken into parts. After raging with incredible fury, it at once burst, and leaving the basin empty, deluged the outside with hot water, which running down in numberless rills joined again in a stream, winding round the foot of the Geyser. It is by the water thus detained in the hollows that the cauliflower-like incrustations are formed and gradually build up the rim of the basin.

The apparent altitude of a mass of water fluctuating every second is, of course, very deceptive; but, on the whole, judging of the height of the pyramid by the proportion that it bore to its base, I should say that it fell little short of

ninety feet. The immense masses of vapour which accompany the boiling water prevent the possibility of following the jets with the eye through their whole length; but this circumstance rather increases than otherwise the beauty and grandeur of the phenomenon, which surpasses the power of representation with the pencil.

It has been remarked that persons are often disappointed at the first sight of another wonder of nature—the Falls of Niagara. The mind requires some time to appreciate the immensity of the cataract presented to the eyes, and till it has arrived at that point, it is little more affected by this than any other great mass of descending water. But the first glance at the Geyser is all-absorbing and holds the spectator as it were under the influence of a spell, only broken by the final bursting of the giant column. Another feature which, I think, makes it superior to Niagara, is that of its being unique, and offering a spectacle for which the eyes have not been

prepared by any inferior phenomenon of the same kind. I had seen waterfalls of surpassing beauty in different parts of Europe, and on beholding the Horseshoe was drawn insensibly into comparisons between it and other falls in respect to the relative height, beauty of surrounding scenery, and many other points. The consideration of all these, takes away from the intensity of the admiration of the principle object; but as the nearest approach to the eruption of the Geyser, that I had ever seen, was the bursting of a fire-plug in the streets of London; and as even the best representations of it in painting had given me but a faint image of its living activity, the unexpected tremour that pervaded the site of the springs, followed by the rush of water that dashed into the air with the velocity of lightning, left me no power to do more than gaze with rivetted eyes on this stupendous display of nature.

The mount that forms the substructure of the basin is covered with innumerable small aper-

tures, some of which throw out steam, and others tiny jets, six inches high, at intervals of two or three minutes. Many of these cavities are filled with boiling clay, of a vermilion colour, while in others mud, of various shades of blue and red, is boiling with the greatest vehemence. In most places, it is sufficient to thrust in a stick to form a new spring. Of petrifactions the grass is the most beautiful, taking its tints from the colour of the water it lies in. A delicate pink and bright red are the prevailing hues, and in patches where pure water only passes over them, the herbs are still alive, though their stalks are perfectly incrusted.

The day was now far advanced, and the weather had grown so severe as to force us to keep inside the tent. We therefore agreed to watch in turns, and to make the rounds of the two great springs every half-hour. About nine o'clock in the evening, as we were drinking a cup of coffee, made with Geyser water, which we found perfectly tasteless, a young man made

his appearance among the springs. He had been shooting in the neighbourhood, and sold us a brace of wild ducks he had fallen in with. In answer to our inquiries about the New Geyser, he told us it had not thrown up water more than twice during the winter, and that its motion was very uncertain. He added, that we might have a chance of forcing it to display its power by choking it with earth. We immediately sprung up and collected sufficient grass turf and peat to fill a large waggon. This we brought close to the edge of the orifice—for this Geyser is merely a round hole, without basin, about ten feet in diameter, with water boiling at a depth of fifteen feet.

The mass of earth being heaped on the weather side of the fountain, we all three, on a given signal, tumbled the whole of it into the pipe. For a second or two the boiling ceased, the water then suddenly rose to the top, and, darting into the air, formed a column about one hundred and twenty feet high. The turf

we had cast in, was hurled out, and lifted even higher than the water. There was, however, much more steam than water, and the violence of the eruption far exceeded that of the greater spring. I have often since been reminded of it by seeing the steam let out of a high-pressure engine. The column was also much less in diameter than in the case of the Great Geyser, and differed but little in circumference in different parts. For five-and-thirty minutes it continued in one uninterrupted jet, tossing up large stones, which, as we threw them at the column, were caught up and projected as out of a cannon. The side opposed to the wind kept perpendicular, totally unaffected by the blast; but to leeward the ground was drenched with the condensed steam for a couple of hundred yards, and strewed with the fibres of turf which had been divested of earth during their continuance in the pipe. Gradually the column, which at first was as black as ink, became paler, and, during the latter half of the eruption, was as white as

that of the Great Geyser. Though after thirty-five minutes' duration, the continued stream failed; yet occasional jets, some of which exceeded the former in height, were thrown up for a quarter of an hour after. As its last efforts died away we attempted a renewal of the phenomenon, by repeating the experiment, but could elicit no more than an increased roaring from the exhausted volcano.

This spring is, in general, more admired by the Icelanders than the Great Geyser. Its superior height, and the greater violence which it exhibits, and chiefly the longer duration of its explosions, certainly justify their choice; in which, however, I believe, few travellers agree with them. Both have their peculiar beauties: the one pleases by its slender proportions, and the other astonishes by its colossal bulk; and they equally serve to show how insignificant the proudest works of art are when compared with those of nature. Had Louis XIV. seen the wonders of the vale of Haukadal, he could

never again have looked with satisfaction on Les Grandes Eaux de Versailles.

The height of these two fountains have been estimated variously by travellers, who have differed in the calculation from three hundred and forty to seventy feet. Sir John Stanley measured them with a sextant, and ascertained the Great to be ninety-six, and the New one hundred and thirty feet high when he saw them. Of course the eruptions vary a little every day, yet from all accounts that I have had from the natives, it appears that neither have lost much or gained for many years.

The New Geyser is called, in Icelandic, "Strokr," which signifies the piston of a churn, or an agitator, and the word Geyser is restricted by them to the greater fountain. It is derived from the verb *geisa*, the meaning of which corresponds more with the French word *jaillir* than any term in our own language.

The cavity that feeds the petrifying rill is one of peculiar beauty: it is filled to the brim with

the clearest water imaginable, of a temperature bordering on boiling, and of unfathomable depth. We could see that its sides expanded as it deepened, and that the spot we stood upon was no more than a fantastic crust, not a foot thick, extending over this vast caldron, whose limits we could only guess at. Across it a natural arch, about three inches wide, connects the two sides, probably left when the openings, which discover the cavity and reveal its beauties, were formed by the falling in of the ground. Over this bridge of Alsirat the young sportsman stepped, repeatedly, backwards and forwards, probably with no great danger to himself, but certainly with no pleasant sensations to the nerves of the spectators, who expected to see him plunged in the boiling gulf below, from which no human power could have withdrawn him alive.

During the night we watched anxiously for a renewal of the spectacle of the day, which had scarce closed on us by half-past eleven;

and, nothing more appearing, we struck our tent, and began our retreat. We were hard pressed for time, or would have willingly remained another day on the spot, and taken advantage of the fine weather that was beginning to show itself. We soon got to Elfstadal, and finding the Hreppstiore and his family were at church, we merely left the horse we had borrowed, and hurried on to Middal. On approaching this place we found the plain filled with horses. The young people of the parish were being confirmed, and an unusually large attendance at church was the consequence. On a dry spot about a hundred men and women's saddles had been piled in heaps, to give the horses the liberty of grazing. The little church resounded with psalms, and when the service was concluded, the clergyman came out, and received the individual thanks of each parishioner for his sermon.

We that night staid at Lauger Valle, and were hospitably entertained by the farmer with

whom I had left my horse. We fared sumptuously on fresh lamb and swan's eggs, and, in addition to this substantial dinner, had "skior," a kind of curds turned acid, which, at this time of the year, was a delicacy that could not be offered but by the more wealthy farmers. A wedding was shortly to take place, and a degree of merriment seemed to reign in the house which is seldom met with among the Icelanders, who are serious to a fault.

At the bottom of the "toon" which bordered the lake, called Apu Vatn, a hot spring rose in the lake, and warmed the water round it for about fifty yards. The water is not thrown up at any time to a greater height than four feet, and in wet weather it scarcely rises above the level of the lake. Unlike the Geysers, it is in continual action. The land at the edge of the water is slightly tinged with yellow, and a faint smell of brimstone (though none can be detected by the taste) issues from the Hverr, as this kind of spring is called in Ice-

landic. A much larger one was visible at some miles distance on the other side of the lake, that gave, by its smoke, the appearance of animation to the scene, which was otherwise a vast desert.

The next morning we continued our journey back to Thingvalle, cheered by the singing of our boy Biorn Thorlakson, who made the passes re-echo with his modulations. His songs, however, were not of the same nature as those with which the Spanish muleteer beguiles the way. Biorn confined himself to hymns, and chanted the Icelandic mass with no little self-complacency, as he was intended for the church, and was already prepared to proceed with his studies at Bessestad.

In the afternoon we reached the Oxeraa, and not wishing to be delayed by stopping with the priest of Thingvalle, we plunged into the stream. We got over safely ourselves; but the horse that was loaded with our clothes and the remainder of our provisions, approached too

near the opening of the Almannagiaa, and was borne away by the current. Before he could recover, he was turned over by the stream, and thoroughly immersed. After some delay, he reached the shore, and with him the unfortunate saddle-bags filled with water. We made a hasty retreat into Almannagiaa, and commenced an inquiry into the amount of damage. The greater part of the eatables were rendered unfit for use, and the clothes were not only drenched, but dyed with coffee and other adjacent articles. Our most annoying loss was the destruction of many of the petrifactions, particularly the brilliant clays. They had all returned to their original liquid state, and imparted their hues to the linen next them. Luckily, the most precious had been laid up in small valises attached to our saddles, and had escaped the general calamity; while a small cask of Geyser water was the only thing on the sumpter-horse that remained uninjured. After restoring some order to our baggage, we ascended the ravine out of

Almannagiaa, and stopped for the night some miles further, at a place called Heide Bai.

The cottage here was so small and wretched, that we preferred borrowing a tent to passing the night where the fish was kept, which was the only apartment untenanted. There was some trouble in selecting a spot on the toon free from snow. This difficulty we overcame, but not so easily another more serious one, the getting some supper. The people of the house could offer us nothing but "afbrost" (the milk of a cow that has newly calved, boiled down to a consistency), and this said afbrost, *ne se laissait pas manger*, for it resembled Indian rubber. A bottle of brandy and some cigars still remained, and on these we feasted, for want of better fare, and then retired to lie on the saddles in the tent.

Biorn, like other Icelanders, was no smoker, though he was devoted to the weed under another form; he therefore sought for consolation in a pinch of snuff. This is the luxury the most

valued by his countrymen after brandy; I might almost put it on a par with that drink to which many are but too strongly attached; and very few, after they come to man's estate, are unprovided with a "boik," or snuffbox, in the form of a powder-horn. Ivory, or the tooth of a walrus, mounted in silver, are the favourite materials for it, and from the small end a plug is drawn, which is attached to the box by a silver chain. Through this aperture a teaspoonful of coarse snuff, which might be mistaken, both by its grain and smell, for tan, is shaken on the back of the hand, from whence it is eagerly sniffed up, and the dose repeated every five minutes. I leave the reader to judge how this habit, religiously persevered in, together with a beard of a fortnight's growth, must improve the appearance.

During the night it froze hard, and when we rose at four, the cold was bitter; the keen air gave us an appetite which it was out of our power to satisfy, so we at once began our

march. Our horses had fared no better than ourselves, and, having been locked up in stables without roofs, were nearly frozen. Walking was preferable, under these circumstances, to riding; and when we reached Mosfell, the horse that had been the most distressed on the way to the Geysers, was so completely knocked up, that we were obliged to leave him behind. We soon got in sight of the sea, and, by four o'clock in the afternoon, were again in Reikiavik, and not before our time, as my brother had to go on board that evening, and, before ten o'clock, was on his way to Liverpool.

CHAPTER XIII.

Esiuberg—Skalholt—Eruption of Skapta Yokul, 1783.

THE earliest Christian church in Iceland was erected, long before the general introduction of that religion, at Esiuberg, near the heathen temple of Kialarness. It is clear that from the first settlement of the island, many of the colonists disapproved of the barbarities committed in the pagan temples, and looked with horror on human sacrifices. One young man, named Biorn, carried his hatred to them so far as to set

the temple of Kialarness on fire, and destroyed with it the idols, that formed the principal ornament of the place.

One Orlyger Rapson, at the particular injunction of a holy man, named Patrick, who converted him, and provided him with the requisite timber, built a little church at Esiuberg, and dedicated it to St. Columba. After his death, his descendants continued in the same faith, though unbaptized, and appeared to have belonged to the sect of the Cuddees, of whom Patrick, in all probability, was one.

Till long after this event Skalholt was of such little consequence as to be passed over without notice in the Landnamma-bok, which gives a very minute account of the first settlers, and of the places they selected for their habitations. The first man who built a house there was Gissur Teitsson, a man of consideration, and the most zealous advocate for the introduction of the Christian religion. This man, in the eleventh century, took up his residence at Skal-

holt, and with a view of fitting his son, Islief, for a priest, sent him to study at Herfuda, now Hervorden, in Westphalia.

In the year 1055 Islief was elected first bishop by the Icelanders, and after living on his father's estate, left it to his son and successor, Gissur, who gave his land and other property towards the erection of a bishopric. This Gissur also induced the Icelanders, in 1096, to agree to pay tithes, one quarter of which were to belong to the bishop. Gradually the see became enriched by various donations, chiefly of landed property. The original cathedral, which was only thirty ells in length, was pulled down, and one of larger proportions, and more costly in its decorations, was substituted by Bishop Klœng, about a hundred years after Islief's election. The church appears by this time to have acquired considerable revenues, for at the consecration of this second edifice, the prelate not only presented to it vessels of gold and jewels, but entertained eight hundred and forty guests, and on their

aking leave, conferred rich gifts on those of rank.

The Icelandic clergy having thought proper to add the name of Thorlak Thorhalleson to the list of Saints, a handsome chapel was built for the reception of his shrine, which is said to have been richly ornamented with jewels. The riches, however, which had accumulated from the offerings of the devotees, were gradually wasted or carried out of the country by the many foreigners who became bishops of Skalholt during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Plagues, famines, and other misfortunes, to which the country has been peculiarly subject, combined to reduce the revenue of the See; yet Ogmund Paulson, the last Catholic who held it, was in possession of much larger property than is found at this time in the hands of one individual. In the enumeration of his various riches, besides numerous farms and four hundred and eighty horses, there is such a long account of the cloth in his house, as to make it resemble

the catalogue of a wholesale linen and woollen draper's sale.

A difference of opinion between him and Jon Arœson, Bishop of Holum, caused so much hatred between the two, that each prelate excommunicated the other, and prepared for a civil war. Ogmund and Jon met at the Althing, near the Oxeraa, the former accompanied by fifteen hundred and sixty horsemen, and the latter by one thousand and eighty. After much mediation by the chief men of the land, the bishops came to an agreement to settle their dispute by single combat between two champions chosen by each party. This mode of decision had been declared illegal as far back as A.D. 1011, in consequence of a fatal duel between two illustrious Scalds, named Gunlög and Rafn. The combat, nevertheless, took place on the first of July, on an island in the river Oxeraa, but no life was lost, and Jon's champion, a Norlander, being declared conquered, a final reconciliation took place.

The next day, the church of Skalholt was burnt by lightning, and all the ornaments and riches it contained were destroyed. Ogmund immediately set about repairing the loss, and in ten years' time had built another cathedral. This bishop becoming blind, while on a journey, chose for his successor Gissur Einarson, who introduced the Lutheran religion into Iceland; having already been converted in secret before his nomination. The same consequences followed the Reformation here, as in England. In 1539, one Dederik von Minden, a Hamburgher, was sent over as commissioner to sequestrate the property of the religious houses.

Having taken possession of Vidoe, near Reikiavik, one of the best monasteries, he proceeded to Osterland, to follow up his operations in that quarter. While passing through Skalholt, he had some quarrel with Ogmund, and made use of harsh and insolent language. While drinking with his followers, he was surprised by Jon Refr (fox), and a band

of armed men, and after a desperate resistance, killed, with seven of his suite. Ogmund was naturally suspected of being the instigator of this massacre, particularly as his people had already, while he was priest of Breide Bolstadir, in 1510, fallen upon a Danish magistrate, while travelling, and killed two, and wounded more of his followers. The next year, however, he solemnly denied any participation in the act at the Althing, and then left the episcopal residence, but continued to oppose the Reformation with all his power.

King Christian III., to hasten its progress, sent over two men of war, under the command of Christopher Hvitfeldt, governor of Trondhjem, who had already succeeded in overthrowing popery in Norway. When this nobleman had found that no opposition was made to him on the southern coast of Iceland, he sent fourteen armed horsemen to Arnœs Syssel, when they seized the Bishop, now eighty years of age, and carried him off from Hjalle, his sister Asdise's farm. In the hopes of being set at liberty, the old man gave

Hvitfeldt large sums of money and promised to give up some of his landed property: but, notwithstanding this and his sister's entreaties, he was carried to Denmark, and died the year after in Soröe monastery, where he was confined by the king's order.

After some years spent in disputes of the same kind, in which the bishops of the two provinces appeared frequently in arms, and besieged each other, the contest ended in the death of Jon Arœson, who was beheaded, with his two sons, on a rock on the northern side of the farm-house at Skalholt.

In 1551 the Reformation was finally established, and with part of the funds of the See, a Latin school was established at Skalholt, where it continued till 1785, when the great eruption of Skapta-fell's Jokul, together with the hard winters and earthquakes, did so much damage to the property of the church, that provisions could no longer be procured for the school; and the bishopric's lands, consisting of three hundred farms, were sold by auction, and the proceeds

placed in the king's chest, from which the salary of the bishop and expenses of the college were to be paid. Finnur Jonson, the Icelandic historian, at that time bishop, bought the house, and the cathedral dwindled into a chapel, annexed to the parish of Torvostad. His son, Hans Finson, last bishop of Skalholt, died here in 1796, and the decayed remains of the old buildings, that had been, in great measure, overthrown in the earthquakes of 1784, were finally removed. Skalholt is, therefore, now nothing more than a common peasant's farm-house, and has returned to exactly the same state it was in eight hundred years ago.

The event that caused this change, was one of the severest calamities that Iceland has suffered, subject as it has frequently been to convulsions of nature. No volcanic eruption, since its colonization, has been so extensive or attended with such disastrous effects. Of the thirty-eight years, immediately following 1316, no less than six are noted in the year books as memorable for earthquakes, tempests, and volcanic

eruptions, which destroyed the cattle, overthrew the farm-houses, and rendered land, hitherto useful, unavailable for pasture. Yet these combined were scarcely equal to the last great eruption, that occurred in 1783, and of which a minute report, with all its consequences, has been drawn up by Magnus Stephenson, by order of Christian VII.

Though the whole land suffered, the part of it the most immediately affected, was the Syssel of Skapta-fell, in the south-east. No portion of the island is more covered with Jokuls than Osterland, and so inaccessible are they that many are unknown to this day. Between them and the sea, the vallies, before this date, were productive enough; and in Catholic times two monasteries had existed, not far from the coast called Kirbubai and Thukebai, whose lands now belong to the king. The part nearest to the Jokuls, was called Sida, and some lofty plains, where the people of the district had a

common right of pasture for their cattle, went under the name of Sidamanna Afrettur.

Among the rivers that water this quarter, the largest is the Skaptà, which takes its name from the mountain, and rises about seven Icelandic (thirty English) miles north of Sida.

It may be as well to notice here, that the natives divide their rivers into two classes, from the difference of their waters: those that descend immediately from the Jokuls, and those whose sources are in the lesser mountains, whose tops are below the line of perpetual congelation. The water of the latter is of the usual colour, whereas that of the former bears the closest resemblance to milk, which is produced by the mixture of comminuted chalk. The rapidity of these rivers is such that they are not able to deposit any great portion of this colouring matter in their course. Several of the larger torrents have been called "Hvità" (white river) by the early settlers, and still retain the name. In

Egyl's Saga, Skallgrim and his companions are reported to have been struck with amazement at the sight of this water; Olafson, however, remarks, that Söndmör, in Norway, the birth-place of Skallgrim, presented, in his day, the same phenomenon.

The spring of 1783 had been remarkably mild; clear still weather, with frequent sunshine, and a prevalence of southerly winds, had advanced the vegetation so much, that plants had made an unusual progress by the month of May—in short, every thing promised a favourable summer and a good harvest; but all these prospects disappeared with the month.

Already a blueish mist in the sky had drawn the attention of the more observant. Many were speculating on the cause of this phenomenon, when the first of June was ushered in with an earthquake over Skapta-fells Syssel, that was repeated daily the whole week. On the eighth, a dark bank appeared in the air,

moving over Sida, from the north; it was soon followed by a shower of ashes, that covered the ground to the thickness of an inch. Noises also were heard issuing from the mountains, like waterfalls and the boiling of vast cauldrons. For two days the bank remained stationary; on the third it rose higher in the air, and discovered columns of fire issuing out of the Jokuls, accompanied by frequent shocks of the earth. The Skaptà had been very full the whole of the spring; on the ninth and tenth it was unusually so. On the eleventh it was suddenly dried up, and its bed filled with a torrent of boiling lava, that overflowed the banks, and bore destruction along with it. The farms that it passed were overwhelmed, and rendered for ever incapable of cultivation. In this way it continued till the eighteenth, fresh streams rolling over the old, melting it in its passage, and forming one solid mass. A thick steam marked its course towards Kirkubai.

On level ground the stream of lava was from twenty to thirty feet high. To escape its fury the peasants fled with their cattle to the Afrettur; but safety was not to be found even here. The sheep, which had aîways been observed in Iceland to turn to the wind, were now unable to face its sulphureous steam, and many rushed madly into the liquid lava and were destroyed.

Before this time the inhabitants of Skaptafells Syssel had been accustomed to use a sort of wild oats found in the plains, of which tolerable bread was made. Three roots also were plentiful in the Afrettur; hvannarôt (root of the Angelica arch-angelica), halltarôt (root of the Cucubalus acaulis), and gelldingarôt (root of Statice armeria). These were of great service to them in hard years, when they formed a palateable meal with butter. Fialla gröss (Lichen Islandicus) also was a favourite dish; but all these were destroyed by the eruption,

which thus forced them to depend still more on foreign produce.

Thirty-three farms were damaged or destroyed. Where the lava did not flow, the grass was poisoned by the black matter that fell on it; even the rain was impregnated with brimstone and ashes.

The other phenomena that accompanied this convulsion of nature were equally terrible. Snow fell on the eleventh and twenty-first of June; and hail of the size of sparrows' eggs. For a long time the sun was obscured, and only occasionally appeared like a ball of fire. The land was not visible to mariners before they were close to the coast; in the mountains it was impossible to see a mile off. In this state of darkness the whole land remained till the month of September, when a strong north wind gradually cleared the atmosphere.

The winter that followed was not calculated to repair the damages of so disastrous a summer.

The severity of the cold was excessive: often twenty degrees (Reaumur); at Skalholt it was on one occasion, twenty-one. Without provender for their cattle, with their houses destroyed, this addition to their misfortunes well-nigh overwhelmed them. But they were reserved for still greater ills. The grass that grew on the ashes produced a complaint among the cattle, that carried of in sixteen out of the nineteen Syssels, 19,488 horses, 6800 horned cattle, and 129,947 sheep; leaving them 1908 of the first, 3064 of the second, and 14,400 of the last. Already in many places they had been obliged to kill during the winter of 1783 a third, and in some places, half of their herds and flocks; and even then the sheep produced only from one to four pounds of tallow each. Vegetation, in some farms near Langancœs, was entirely stopped; provender not even for a single cow could be produced.

The lakes turned blue, and sometimes yellow;

and their sides were strewed with fish, killed by the ashes and brimstone that had fallen into them. The swans, also, that come yearly, were driven away or killed by the smoke; and the few eggs found in the hills were uneatable. The plague now transferred itself from the cattle to the inhabitants; a cramp, accompanied by swellings of the throat and limbs, and other more deadly symptoms, seized on those who lived in the neighbourhood of the eruption, and raged during the winter and spring that succeeded it. Many died of hunger and want of assistance in their illness: in the farm of Nupstad all the inhabitants died, and their corpses were found by chance by some travellers who passed that way.

It has been calculated that the loss of life, consequent on the eruption and the plague and famine that followed, amounted to above 9000, and by the destruction of their farms and cattle many of the survivors were reduced to utter destitution, and wandered about, beg-

ging help from the people on the coast. The latter did what little they could to better their condition, but they were themselves poor, and a plan was formed for colonizing the heaths of Jutland with these unhappy peasantry. The idea was afterwards abandoned, and by a succession of good seasons, the population of the island has increased to beyond what it was at the beginning of the 18th century.

CHAPTER XIV.

Vidoe — The eider-ducks — The Icelandic printing-press—Icelandic poetry—A magazine—The Runic characters—Codex Argenteus.

DURING our absence in the interior, the French corvette had left Reikiavik, and sailed to Dyre Fiord, in Westerland. The priest, Jon Sivertson, from whom the captain expected to derive some intelligence concerning the Lilloise, was unable to throw any more light on the subject, and after the inquiries had been repeated, to no purpose, along the north-west coast of the

island, the Recherche directed her course towards Old Greenland. Before they had proceeded far they were checked by the ice, which presented an insurmountable bar to any communication with the land. They were not even able to penetrate far enough to see the coast; the weather continued as unfavourable as possible to the expedition, and at the end of August they returned to Reikiavik, with the object of the mission no further advanced than when they left it.

The coldness of the season had delayed the arrival of the eider-ducks beyond the usual time for their breeding. About the beginning of June a few made their appearance, and within a fortnight afterwards the bay of Reikiavik swarmed with them, whenever the weather was calm. The principal spots in Faxefiord, on which they breed, are Vidoe and Engoe, two pleasant islands in sight of Reikiavik, a third, and smaller one, called Ephersoe, would also be tenanted by these birds, were it not, at

low water, accessible to foxes and dogs by a reef, which is dry at spring-tides, and forms the principle protection of the harbour.

Vidoe is interesting as being the place from which all the literature of the country is disseminated, for it contains the only printing-press now existing in Iceland. The art was first introduced, at the time of the Reformation, by Jon Arœson, bishop of Holum, one of its most strenuous opposers, who hoped, by the aid of typography, to check the change of opinion which was gaining ground. He accordingly brought over a Swede, who superintended the establishment of a press in Nordland, which helped to overthrow its founder and the supremacy of his religion in that quarter, for among the first books that were issued from it was an Icelandic version of the Bible, by Gulbrandr Thorlakson, in use to this day. It must have been sufficient for the literary wants of the country, for, till the middle of the last century, no attempt at a rival establishment was made;

and when at length a second press was set up, in Hrappsey, an island in Breidefiord, a very inconsiderable number of books appeared from it, and a society, called "Islanska Bokmenta Felags," or the Icelandic Book Society, purchased both, and united them at Leira, in Borgafiord. Subsequently, Magnus Stephenson, the principal promoter of the society, on his removal to Vidoe, transferred the press to the latter place, where it now remains, rented from the Bokmenta Felags by his son.

As, besides seeing the eider-ducks, the Frenchmen had a wish to purchase some books printed in the country, we made a party to visit the proprietor of the island. The road to the spot where the crossing is the shortest is very rough, and we willingly availed ourselves of the offer of a boat belonging to one of the ships in the harbour. We landed at some steep stone steps, which were separated from the house by a lawn, planted with about fifty trees. Though very young, they are already more than twelve

feet high, and will, probably, thrive better than most others, being protected from the wind by the house at the back and a hill on each side. The house is about the size of the governor's, and is flanked on one side by a small chapel. Its dilapidated state, however, and the half-rotten window-frames, in which broken panes of glass have been replaced by wooden panels, present a marked difference between the two; and the appearance of the exterior is not further improved by a wooden porch intended to screen the entrance from the wind, which, I suspect, requires some more substantial bulwark than the rickety kind of sentry-box that is opposed to its violence. The principal apartment is both large and lofty, and, when we entered it, was filled with tables loaded with books in sheets. The uniformity of the whitewashed walls was broken by different patches of damp, as well as by a few prints of the Danish royal family, and some likenesses of such of the Stephenson family as had been in Copenhagen.

Among them I remarked the portrait of Magnus Stephenson, the father of the present proprietor of Vidoe, who, during this century and the end of the last, made a considerable figure in his country. His father was Stiftamtmand, and he himself filled the post of Justitiarius, of which one of his brothers was secretary, another being Amtmand of Westerland. The glory of the Stephensons, however, has not been able to reach the third generation, and several of the grandsons of the governor have fallen back into the class of boors.

Magnus himself, without doubt, was a very superior man, and exerted himself in every way that he thought would be conducive to the good of his country. Not satisfied with putting within the reach of his fellow-citizens foreign works of merit and utility, and also adding considerable original matter to the stock of Icelandic literature, he laboured incessantly to ameliorate their physical condition by the introduction of superior breeds of cattle, and im-

provements in their limited husbandry. It is at no time easy to overthrow customs sanctioned by length of time, and it is, therefore, not astonishing that the Icelanders, who are most particularly prejudiced in favour of the habits of their forefathers, neglected to second with zeal the exertions of this well-wisher of his country.

The whole of the hill to the west of the house was strewn with nests of ducks. So much do these interesting birds feel their security in Vidoe, that five of them had chosen as their location, the ground under a narrow bench that runs along the windows of the house: and so perfectly fearless were they, that, without moving away, they would peck at the hand that disturbed them. The rising ground is particularly favourable for the birds to build on, being covered with hollows and inequalities, that serve to protect them from the weather, and only require the addition of down to convert them into nests. The drakes are easily known by their white and black plumage; but the dark

hue of the females makes it difficult to distinguish them from the holes in which they sit. Owing to their lying close, I have frequently trodden on them, without their warning me of their presence till the mischief was done. The drakes, though by no means wild, will not allow themselves to be handled so freely as the ducks, and mostly keep together on the top of the hill.

As soon as a nest is completed, it is usual to remove the greater part of the down, while the bird is away feeding; and this operation is repeated a second, and occasionally a third, time. On her return, the bird makes up the deficiency thus created, by stripping her own breast; and, when her stock is exhausted, she calls on her mate to add his portion, which will bear no comparison with the sacrifice she has made. The same sort of spoliation is practised with regard to the eggs, care being taken that three or four are left; for should the bird on her return find the nest empty, she will desert it, and not breed again the same season. About six, con-

siderably larger than those of tame ducks, and of a light green colour, are found in each nest. Their flavour is very inferior to that of hens' eggs, but they are not so strong as to prevent their being made into omelettes.

The average quantity of down obtained from three nests is half a pound, so mixed with grass and foreign matter, that forty pounds in that state are reduced to fifteen, after it has been thoroughly cleaned. Vidoe and Engoe together produce, I believe, about three hundred pounds weight yearly, which would, if the above calculation is correct, make the number of ducks that come to these two places fall not far short of ten thousand every year. The number, however, that breed in Faxèfiord is small, compared to those that bend their course to Breidèfiord. The innumerable little islands that fill that bay afford ample shelter and security to eider-ducks, who seem to avoid nothing so much as any place accessible to foxes. These cunning animals are particularly fond of their eggs; but,

though we will give them all credit for ingenuity in getting at them, we can hardly be expected to put much faith in the story told about them by the Danish travellers Olavson and Paulson. When, say they, the Icelandic foxes have detected any crows' eggs in an inaccessible place, they take one another's tails in their mouths, and form a string of sufficient length to reach the nest, and let one end of it over the rock. They have, however, forgotten to tell us how the eggs are passed up by these craftiest of Reynards.

The separation of the down from the grosser feathers and straws, occupies the women during winter. It is then thoroughly divested of particles too minute for the hand to remove, by being heated in pans and winnowed like wheat. Should it become matted and dead, it is again subjected to a brisk heat, which restores its original elasticity and increases its bulk. As in the case of ostriches, the down taken after death, is inferior to that which the living duck

tears from its breast, which prevents their destruction through wantonness. They are besides protected by the law, which punishes the shooting of them by a pecuniary penalty, and the forfeiture of the weapon used. Nor are guns allowed to be fired in the neighbourhood during their sojourn; and even the corvette that brought the prince, abstained in the spring from saluting him.

The chapel was, when we saw it, used as a carpenter's workshop, and numerous lines were also stretched across the upper part of it, hung with sheets fresh from the press. It is superior to the common country churches, and is kept in good repair. Behind it is a small family burying-ground, in which I observed the first gravestones I had seen in the country.

A mere earthen hut contains the two printing-presses, which are of a very ordinary description, and were at this time unused, for want of a supply of paper. A monthly magazine of the size of the Mirror was started, under the super-

intendence of the Stift Profastur, but its publication was several times suspended, on account of this deficiency of materials. Its contents embrace a few of the principal events in the rest of Europe, and the remainder is filled up with topics of interest in the island. The name of Sunnar Postinn, or Southern Post, was given to it in imitation of another periodical of the same nature, which the late Magnus Stephenson conducted for several years, under the title of "Klaustri Postin," or the Post of the Cloister, because published at Vidoe, which was formerly a monastery.

It has been remarked, that there must be much leisure in any country, before there can be much literature, and that where a few good books have been handed down to us, a great many bad ones must have been written. Upon this principle, it is difficult to conceive how a country like Iceland could have found time for literature. It would be supposed, that all its genius would have been expended in supplying

the common wants of life; but upon this frozen soil poets sang, and historians recorded for future ages. Manuscripts are in such plenty, that Sir Joseph Banks, on his return, presented the British Museum with more than three hundred, and a vast number have been published at Copenhagen, by the Society of Antiquities of the North. Many of the latter are valuable, as giving a minute account of the manners of the people, and promoting civilization, by making the powers of the mind an object of veneration to men, whose situation might incline them to respect those only of the body.

But though the prose works of the Icelanders are voluminous, it is to the poetry of their Scalds that this country is chiefly indebted. The character of their poems is adapted to the gloomy climate in which they lived, and when mythological, they are extremely obscure, on account of the metaphors in which they abound. When they descend to the deeds of simple mortals, and become more intelligible, the cleaving of

skulls and bucklers, and the feeding the "yellow-footed bird" with the carcasses of their enemies, are the subjects upon which their bards love to expatiate; and the joys of drinking ale in Vallhalla, in the company of Odin and his heroes, call forth their highest praises.

Occasionally they indulge in softer strains, and the love of some hero for a gold-ringed maid is the theme of their song; but, even while handling this subject, the poet cannot divest his verse of ferocity, and the acquisition of the lady involves the destruction of her family. Nor is she herself always safe. Skirner, when sent by his master Niordur to woo for him,* Girda, finding the offer of eleven apples and a gold ring endowed with magic powers unavailing, threatens to slay both her and her father, and at last gains his suit by producing a wand which enables him to consign her to endless misery, if she rejects his solicitations.

* "Journey of Skirner." Edda 8.

The love of poetry has not been extinguished by the numerous calamities that have overwhelmed the Icelanders at different times for the last eight centuries, and at this moment many men might be found who would not disgrace the ancient Scalds. Some in later years have, besides writing original poems, undertaken the translation of works in other languages. The principal book at present in the course of publication at Vidoe, is a prose translation of Homer's Odyssey, by Sveinbiorn Egylson, one of the Professors of Bessestad; and I have been told by persons fully competent to judge of its merits, that the part already completed is very well done. But among translations, the metrical version of Milton's Paradise Lost, by Jon Thorlakson, is allowed to be pre-eminent. This man was a priest in Osterland; and when I have said that he was looked upon as a poor priest by his countrymen, some idea of his penury may be formed. His benefice did not bring him in more than forty shil-

lings a year, and I am afraid he did not derive much from other sources. In the midst of this distress, however, he not only wrote several original pieces, but studied the English language, to qualify himself for the task he had undertaken. Besides the Paradise Lost, he translated Pope's Essay on Man, and his poverty and genius having been made known to a society in London, 20*l.* were subscribed and sent to him. But the help came too late, and before the sum had arrived, which might have procured him some comforts in his old age, the poet had sunk into the grave.

The metre adopted by Jon Thorlakson in his translation, is the old verse used in the Edda of Sœmundr, the peculiarity of which consists in the rhyme being at the beginning of the line, and its depending on the repetition of a particular letter in each couplet. This mode of having a prevailing sound, as well as the general structure of the verse, is better explained by an extract from the Fœringa Saga, or tale of the

Feroe isles, which, though not strictly regular in all its parts, will give some notion of the Icelandic metre. It is the Creed of Thràndr, a Feroese, newly converted to Christianity, who, in answer to the inquiries of a woman into his belief, repeats the following words:

Gàngat ek einn ut
Fjorir mèr fyglia
Fimm Guds èinglar
Bęlek bœn fyrer mèr
Bœn fyrer Kristi
Syng ek sàlma sjö
Sjál Gud hluta min.

["I go not out alone, four follow me, five angels of God; I offer a prayer for myself, a prayer for Christ; I sing seven psalms, God preserve my soul!"]

The above lines will show that there exists a trifling similitude between the English and Icelandic languages. The latter was in general use in Scandinavia before the tenth century, and was introduced into Iceland by the first settlers. Gradually the ancient language divided itself into several dialects. On the continent it under-

went great changes, and was the root of the modern Swedish and Danish; the former still retains considerable likeness to the modern Icelandic. In the Feroe Isles, the old Gothic took another form, and laid the foundation of a distinct language, spoken in that place to this day. In Iceland alone it has been retained pure, and, with the exception of a trifling departure from its ancient forms, it has remained essentially the same tongue, mainly owing to the little communication that the natives have with strangers. Their old Sagas supply them amply with amusement and instruction, and serve to keep alive the language which was spoken by Ingolf. Not that in modern times the isle has been deficient in authors, though, from the political state of the country, they have been obliged to forego the two principal departments in which their ancestors excelled, namely, history and war-songs.

There is a peculiarity in the Icelandic tongue, which it has in common with ours. It is the

retention of the sound "th," sounded, perhaps, sharper than in English. They have still kept the old form of the aspirated *t*, which is written the same as in the Anglo-Saxon alphabet. Before the introduction of Christianity the Runic characters were in use instead of the Gothic. There has been much dispute about the meaning and derivation of the word Runic, which appears to signify simply letters.

At present, both in writing and printing, the Gothic character is made use of in general, few books in the Icelandic appearing in the Latin style, except the splendid Magnæan edition of the Sagas, published at Copenhagen.

In the library of Upsala there is a manuscript, which may be looked upon as one of the greatest curiosities in that university. It is known by the name of "Codex Argenteus," which it derives from the silver letters in which the body of it is written. The initials of chapters, and some few passages, are distinguished from the rest by being in gold. It contains the four

Gospels in the Mœso-Gothic language, and is supposed to be a copy of the translation made by Ulphilas, the Apostle of the Goths, in the fourth century. By some it has been doubted whether it can lay claim to so great antiquity, but none have attributed it to a later date than the middle of the sixth century.

The history of so venerable a volume, which contains the only remaining specimen of the root of the modern northern languages, must be interesting. It is strange that it should have remained unnoticed for near twelve hundred years; such, however, was the case. It was first discovered in a Benedictine convent in Westphalia, about 1597, and was removed to Prague, where it remained till the storming of of the town by the Swedes in 1648. By the fortune of war, it fell into the hands of Count Königsmark, who presented it to the Queen of Sweden, as a tribute to her learning. Christina, about the same time, invited Isaac Vossius, of Leyde, to her court, and purchased from him

his father's library. She also gave him a handsome appointment, and employed him to collect books and manuscripts for her throughout Europe. The place of librarian of Upsala becoming vacant, it was conferred on him, but, at the abdication of the queen, he left the north and returned to Holland.

It was at this time that the charge of plundering Christina's library was brought against him. Whether, according to his own account, he made a selection for himself with the queen's leave, or, as was generally supposed, he carried them off surreptiously, is not clear; but it is certain that many valuable books disappeared with him, and among others the "Codex Argenteus." Fortunately it was returned by Count Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie, a Swedish nobleman, who purchased the manuscript from the executors of Vossius for two hundred and fifty pounds sterling, and presented it to the university of Upsala.

The volume is a quarto, with violet coloured leaves, in fair preservation. The beginning of

St. Matthew, and St. John, and some other parts are lost. The characters are a mixture of Greek, Roman, and Runic, and the whole is written in capitals. As it is the oldest form of Gothic known, and the Icelandic the oldest form in use, the two following copies of the Lord's prayer, the first from the Codex, and the second from a modern Icelandic Bible, will show the connexion between the two.

"Atta unsar thu in Himinam; weihnai namo thein; quimai thindinassns theins; wairthai vilja theins sue in Himina, jah ana airthai; hlaif unsarna thana sinteinan gif uns himnidaga; jah aflet uns thatei skulans sigaima sua sue jah weis afletam thaim skulam unsaraim; jah ne briggais uns in fraistubnjai, ak lausei uns af thamma unbillim; unte theina is thindangardi, jah mahts, jah walthus in Aiwins. Amen."

"Fader vor, thu sem ert à Himnum, helgest thitt nafn; tilkome thitt rike; verde thinn vile svo à jördu sem à himne; gef thu oss i dag vort daglegt braud. Og firergef oss vorar skulder,

svo sem ver fyrergifum vorum skulldunautum og innleid oss eigi i freistne, helldur frelsa thu oss frà illu; thuiad thitt er riked og màttur og dyrd om allder allda. Amen."

CHAPTER XV.

Kieblivik—Poverty of the clergy—Education at Bessestad — Provision for Icelandic students at Copenhagen —Trade with Iceland—Mortality of infants in Westman Isles.

A VISIT that I made to Kieblivik, shortly before leaving Iceland, gave me an opportunity of traversing the whole length of the lava, that covers the south-western extremity of the island, called Gulbringe Syssell. The Hraun that surrounds Havnifiord, though it had at first sight appeared most terrific, had gradually lost its horrors, yet

these were not sufficient to prepare me for the state of the country beyond that place. With the exception of one spot on the road, we met with no sign whatever of vegetation; and I do not recollect ever having seen so intricate and baffling a pathway as that formed between the clumps of blistered lava. On the left hand, the sulphur mountains of Krusivik bounded the sight; while on the right, Snœfell Jokul reared its white top at the distance of forty-eight miles.

Kieblivik offers nothing more than an open roadstead to shipping, and that so exposed, that while vessels are discharging or taking in cargoes, the work is continued without intermission both night and day. The sole inducement to make this a trading place was the goodness of the fishery, and the bartering of cod for necessaries by the people who come down for the season.

As the fishing was over, the place was almost deserted; the permanent population consisting of the factors of the principal merchants, their

families, and a few dependents. The ground at the back of the village is covered with stones, and in its natural state unfit to produce even a weed. Two of the merchants, however, have been at the trouble of making about twenty acres into meadow land by transporting on the backs of horses, the soil required, which had to be collected for some miles round the neighbourhood. The expense, it may be supposed, was not trifling, and I fear far surpassed the advantage as yet derived. The fact is, that if cost were disregarded, the vegetable products of Iceland might be considerably increased, but as the object is not merely to produce, but to produce with economy, till its nature undergoes some great revolution, the efforts of its inhabitants will avail but little in improving its surface.

Among other persons at Kieblivik, I met the newly-appointed Pastor of Grundevik. This young man had lately returned from the university of Copenhagen, where he had distinguished himself by his talents, and acquired a reputation

for great abilities. It will hardly be credited that his industry for many years, and his perseverance through difficulties, was rewarded by a benefice worth fifty shillings per annum, at its highest valuation. Nor was he the most unfortunate of his class, for many have not even the choice of such a preferment as Grundevik for a dozen years after they have qualified themselves for the church, which they cannot enter before they are appointed to some parish.

In consequence of this delay, many students who have concluded their studies at Bessestad, are obliged to seek lay employment till they are appointed to benefices. Being in the predicament of the unjust steward, they prefer entering into the service of the traders to returning to field labour, and many engage themselves for clerks during the busy part of summer, when an extra number of hands is required; a few obtain permanent situations as factors. It may be easily imagined, that a counter-jumper is not the best person to select

for a clergyman, and of this many are sensible, but the wants of most, who cannot remain at home, force them to this mode of earning a livelihood.

The lot of those whose better circumstances at home enable them to finish their education in Denmark is not much easier. The allowance derived from their parents is rarely sufficient to support them in Copenhagen without some addition from other sources. A part of the university, called Regencen, is reserved for the Icelandic students, a limited number of whom are allowed a room between two, and a weekly allowance of a silver rixdollar and some firing. Here the poor youths continue to labour with unwearied perseverance; and when, after a period protracted by a portion of their time being given up to the instruction of others, they leave the university, their names are seldom omitted in the list of classical honours.

On my return from Kieblivik, I found that the "Handelstid," or trading time, was approach-

ing at Reikiavik, and that the bustle consequent on it was changing the face of the town. Peasants, leading twenty, and sometimes thirty, horses in a string, were every five minutes making their appearance, with their last year's produce of wool, tallow, and fish. On arriving at an open space in the middle of the town, called Ostervall, they pitch their tents, unload their horses, and remove them to plains outside. Their progress to the coast is orderly and well regulated; but their return, particularly the first day's journey, is not always conducted with the same steadiness, owing partly to the corn brandy that they bring back with them. Their disputes are rarely followed by any serious consequences, wrestling being the mode adopted for settling their differences. The variety also of bulky articles which they have to transport home gives them much trouble. Planks, in particular, with their ends trailing on the ground, are a source of continual annoyance, frightening the horses, who are unused to the

noise, and in their struggles upset those fastened to them, staving the casks against the rocks on the side of the path, and strewing their load about the plain. At night they are hobbled and left to shift for themselves, there being no danger of their straying far away.

From the middle of the seventeenth century to 1776, the Icelandic trade was monopolized by a company of Hamburg merchants settled at Bergen. At the end of that time the King of Norway determined to carry it on himself, and established factories in each port. The speculation, however, turned out to be more profitable tothe agents than to the principal, who, after suffering an annual loss of twelve thousand pounds, retired at the end of ten years, and opened the trade to all his subjects. Any commerce with foreigners was strictly interdicted, and no ships, except Norwegians with timber, are to this day allowed to enter any Icelandic port, and even Norwegian vessels are obliged to

have a special permission from Copenhagen. During the war the government found it difficult to enforce these regulations, and divers British subjects carried on a trade with the country, at first by force, and afterwards by an agreement wrung from the governor. The peace put an end to this open commerce, but it has been found impossible to check as general a contraband trade carried on by the natives with the crews of French and Dutch fishing-vessels. There are one-and-twenty ports, besides one in the Westman isles, most of which have only one or two merchants in them.

Reikiavik had, while I was there, sixteen or seventeen permanent establishments in it, and was besides yearly visited by about five and twenty galliots and sloops, which sailed from port to port, and were not allowed, by the conditions imposed on the trade by Christian VII., to remain more than a month at a time in the same harbour. The ports are principally on the western coast, those on the northern being

particularly dangerous in summer on account of the drift-ice from Greenland. On the southern, which is but little peopled, there is but one solitary port, Oreback, which is so difficult of approach, that ships are delayed weeks together at its entrance.

The principal exports are wool, tallow, and stockfish, the latter from the south and west, and the former, as well as a large quantity of knit goods, from Nordland. These, with blue and white fox-skins, swansdown, feathers, and lichen Islandicus, form nearly the whole of their products.

In return, they take rye, tobacco, and corn brandy, a few manufactured goods, such as cloth, hardware, and a trifling quantity of linen. The little flour that comes to the island stops at the ports, but coffee and sugar are scarcely looked upon as luxuries, and are articles of universal consumption. A small quantity of coal for the smithies, and several cargoes of salt for the fisheries, are annually sent for to Liverpool,

and, with these few helps from abroad, they manage to subsist, every article almost that they possess being of home manufacture.

The circulating medium is entirely of silver, and though the legal currency is properly the same as that of Denmark, another, which gives an increased value of fifty per cent. to the coins, has been adopted of late years between individuals. No bank notes are in circulation, nor are gold and copper ever met with. The coins in use are the specie dollar, which is worth four shillings and sixpence, and smaller pieces, which represent its parts, from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{192}$, besides several of antique date, that bear no relation to it.

By the end of August, the produce of the year had been collected, and the shipping prepared to leave the island for Europe. The majority were bound for Copenhagen and the small Danish islands, and the remainder were to sail direct with stockfish to Spain. The war in the latter country had rendered the markets uncer-

tain in the northern provinces, and I doubt whether more than one vessel went that year into Bilboa. The French *savans* had made large collections of minerals and animals in Westerland, and besides divers casks filled with preparations, took with them some live specimens of horses, eagles, hawks, and foxes. The carnivorous part of the collection was easily provided for by slaughtering some of their horses, but considerable difficulty had to be overcome in procuring forage for two live horses, as the grass was not yet made into hay, and the little that was cut lay rotting in the rain.

The zoology of Iceland presents nothing marked either in the number or appearance of its quadrupeds. The domestic part is confined to the horse, cow, sheep, dog, and cat. The goat is occasionally met with in Nordland, and the pig, though individuals have been once or twice imported, is too expensive to rear in a country, where neither grain nor vegetables are easily raised.

The hardihood and sagacity of the horses cannot be too much admired. The first quality will scarcely be denied them by any one who has seen them lie out the whole winter, with no other shelter than that of their coats, which are longer than bears', and obliged to sustain life by picking up sea-weed on the shore. When hard pressed by hunger, many will devour fish, and thrive on it. In travelling over the plains that abound in quagmires, too much reliance cannot be placed in the sagacity of these beasts whose instinct will carry them safe through the greatest difficulties. On coming to a doubtful place, both their scent and feeling will be put in requisition; and, should they refuse to advance, not even the severest application of the whip will suffice to urge them on. On one or two occasions I have seen an obstinate rider overcome the reluctance of his horse to proceed, and an immersion up to the neck in mud was the invariable consequence.

The cows are rarely to be found with horns;

but nature has been more bountiful to the sheep in this respect, and wethers with four, and sometimes six, of these appendages, are not uncommon. Their wool is coarse, and approaching to the nature of hair; and it is the custom of the shepherds to tear it off the animals, instead of shearing them. The only reason assigned for this practice is the severity of the climate, which would not admit of the sheep being at once stripped entirely of their winter clothing.

Shakspeare has marked the distinguishing feature of the "prick-eared cur of Iceland," which, in other respects, resembles the dog used for draught by the Esquimaux. He is perhaps smaller, and is put to no use but that of keeping the sheep, and driving cattle off the toon or meadow.

If the number of their domestic animals is limited, that of the wild ones is still more so. Reindeer and foxes may be said to include the whole denomination; for though a few white bears are found every winter in Nordland, they

are visiters and not natives, coming on the ice from Greenland, and happy to find their way back to it, if they are fortunate enough to escape the bullets with which the peasants are sure to welcome their landing. The foxes are blue and white; the former variety being in reality of a very deep iron-gray colour.

The Frenchmen are fortunate enough to procure a specimen of the hawks of this country, which were so famous when falconry was in vogue. Of the two varieties of gray and white the latter was the most valued for its beauty and docility; and so much prized were they in Europe, that till late years, the King of Denmark kept a mews in Reikiavik, for the reception of these birds, which were yearly sent for, when their education was completed, in a ship expressly fitted up for their conveyance. The house appropriated to them still exists on the beach; but it has degenerated into a common store.

Two things must be noticed, in reference

to the animal part of the creation of this country. The first is, that in common with Ireland, it has the privilege of being free from toads, serpents, and all venomous creatures, which would argue that St. Patrick at some time paid it a visit. The other is, the strange effect produced by the natives living, in some districts, on sea-fowl. In the Westman Isles, the use of them is universal, not only as food but fuel. After being plucked, they are dried and heaped up in stacks, and serve for firing during winter. The effluvia arising from them while burning, is of course pestilential; but it is of no consideration with the Icelanders. This, however, is nothing to the consequence attributed to the eating them; every child born there is attacked, soon after its birth, by a disease that ends in lock-jaw, and never allows it to survive the seventh day. One only child, that has been kept in the Westman Isles, has escaped, but as it was of Danish parents, whose diet differs from that of the natives, this exception does not of course, affect the universal rule.

CHAPTER XVI.

Population—National character—Weddings—Funerals—Departure from Iceland—Eld Eyar—Feroe Isles.

THE Icelanders are not generally considered very long lived; the hardships that the majority undergo in the sea fishery, must naturally wear out their frames, and many suffer at an early age from rheumatism. In 1801 the population amounted to 47,209, of whom 25,700 were females. Of this number forty-one were above ninety years of age. At present the island contains about 53,000 souls. I have heard the natives say that there exists a prophecy to the effect that the population will never reach

60,000; it has, however, been stated, that in the old times, before the plague called Suartr Daudi visited them, it amounted to a hundred thousand.

The disposition of the Icelanders is serious, and by many has been considered even morose. Travellers who have made it their business to inquire more particularly into their religious feelings, have reported very favourably of them in that respect, and even the casual observer must be struck with the great attention they pay to devotional exercises.

Except in the trading places and fishing stations on the coast, where they have often much idle time on their hands from the badness of the weather preventing them from putting to sea, in a moral point of view their character is generally unexceptionable. The cases of dishonesty which came to my knowledge were neither many nor very serious. Sometimes a keg of tallow is found to contain a stone which will add a pound or two to its weight,

but this species of fraud is not of frequent occurrence. As for crimes of deeper dye, such as robbery accompanied with violence, or murder, they are very rare; and in this respect the modern Icelanders are widely different from their ancestors, who, it has been shown in the foregoing pages, were turbulent and bloodthirsty as late as the sixteenth century.

Four years previous to my visiting the country, a peasant in Nordland was murdered by a man and woman, who afterwards set fire to his house with a view of concealing their crime. I did not hear the exact inducement that prompted this act, but there must have been some attenuating circumstances attending it, as all the sympathy was in favour of the murderers, and the victim was spoken of with hatred. The case was clearly brought home to them, yet the transmission of the evidence from Nordland to Reikiavik, and thence to Denmark, occupied so much time, that two years and a half had elapsed before the warrant of the king arrived

for their decapitation. Even then it was expected that their execution would be delayed, as neither executioner nor proper instrument of death was to be found in the island, and it would be necessary to remove them to Norway. When the time came, this additional delay was rendered unnecessary, by the offer of the brother of the murdered man to take on him the office of headsman. However strange it may appear, the proposal was accepted, though savouring strongly of revenge, and the execution took place.

Suicides, and all who have forfeited their lives to the law are excluded from consecrated ground. Their bodies are merely covered with a heap of stones in the form of a barrow; some such have been pointed out to me, nor is there any probability of their disappearing with time, as it is customary for every one who passes by to add a stone to the heap.

The Icelandic weddings and funerals remain to be noticed, though they are marked by little to distinguish them from the same ceremonies

in other Protestant countries. When a marriage is to take place, the party proceeds to church in regular order, the bridegroom leading the men, and the bride following them, accompanied by the women. When arrived at the place of worship, the male part of the friends take their seats, with the bridegroom, on the left, and the female, with the bride, remain on the right side of the church. After a hymn has been sung, they are each presented to the priest by a sponsor. The usual questions are asked, and, after an address and a few more psalms, the new-married people are dismissed, and walk home side by side, the rest of the party following in the same order as before the ceremony. The feasting is kept up for two or three days, and attended with much conviviality. An old custom still remains in force, by which the bridemaids refuse the husband access to his wife's room till he promises to give her a present on the following morning. The settlement of this agreement often takes up several hours,

during which the women are inexorable and keep the man out.

The funerals are conducted with much solemnity, and little of that carousing that is met with on the same occasions in other northern countries. A funeral oration is read over the body, by the priest, who calls the attention of those present to the most remarkable traits in the life of the deceased, and concludes his address with a suitable exhortation. These orations are not omitted even at the funerals of infants, and the ingenuity of the clergyman must often be severely taxed to find any thing worthy of notice even in those who have died at a mature age. The procession then follows the corpse to the churchyard, and, after it has been lowered into the grave, the priest throws in a spadeful of earth. While the penitential psalms are being sung the rest of the company follow his example, one or two jumping into the grave, and stamping down the earth. As soon as it is filled the ceremony is concluded, and each man returns home.

The time having now arrived for my departure I engaged a passage in a small cutter of eighty tons burden, bound for Altona, and took leave of my friends at Reikiavik. My stay had lasted rather more than a twelvemonth, and though I had often met with annoyances, of many and various kinds, I had repeated opportunities of marking the estimable qualities of the Icelanders' character—calm, orderly, and persevering. I had found them a people capable of great labour of mind and body, and though not abounding in men of genius, producing zealous and indefatigable scholars, they present an example of how independent the human intellect is of climate. In Italy we find nature luxuriant and beautiful, and man only dwindling into insignificance: in Iceland we find him rising superior to the difficulties that surround him, and achieving a complete victory over the circumstances in which he is placed.

On the third of September we set sail; the

weather was dark and threatening, yet till we cleared the land it continued tolerably moderate. Soon after we had passed the Eld Eyar, or Fire Islands, off Cape Rakianess, the lateness of the season became apparent, and we met with one continued succession of gales.

These islands are merely barren rocks, generally covered with seafowl, that have been thrown up by submarine volcanoes, About a month before the great eruption took place in Skapta Felds Syssel, a volcano burst forth at sea, seventy miles in a south-western direction from Reykianess, and threw up such a quantity of pumice-stone as to impede the navigation. On further examination, a new island was discovered to have risen out of the ocean, consisting of lofty cliffs, within which a fire raged with great violence, and hurled out pumice-stones. It was called Nyoe, or New Island, and taken possession of in the name of the King of Denmark ; but before it had been in existence quite a year, it disap-

peared, and the only trace of this ephemeral land is a sunken rock to the west of the Eld Eyar.

Mount Hekla is generally the last spot seen on bearing away to the south, and about a week after losing sight of it we approached the Feroe Isles, between which and the Orkneys we beat about for a fortnight, baffled by easterly gales, that prevented our entering the North Sea.

It is generally believed that the Norwegians, who first established themselves in these islands, gave them the name of Faroe,* from the number of sheep they found in them. The term Feroe is also perhaps derived from *fier*, feathers, an article which in consequence of the number of seafowl caught there is very abundant. The isles are in number twenty-two, seventeen of which are inhabited; they occupy from north to south sixty-seven miles, and extend in breadth forty-five. They are about three hundred and eighty miles distant from Norway, and two hundred from Shetland.

* Description of the Feroe Isles. By G. Landt.

They consist of a group of steep hills, rising from the sea, chiefly of a conical form, and close to each other; some proceed with an even declivity to the shore, but the greater part have two or three, or more sloping terraces, formed by projecting rocks, and covered with a thin stratum of earth, which produces grass. Close to the sea, however, the land in general consists of perpendicular rocks, from two to three hundred fathoms in height. The loftiest mountain is two thousand two hundred and forty feet high, and from its summit, which is a plain of six hundred feet by two hundred, the whole of the Feroe Isles can be seen in clear weather.

The inhabitants are more superstitious than the Icelanders, whom they resemble in their manners, coming from the same stock; but as they have no intercourse, many of their customs as well as their languages only show a common origin. The population amounts to about 5000, which gives ten persons to the square mile.

From the badness of weather, and perhaps of the article itself, our bread had become so

mouldy as to be unfit to eat, and we put into Christianstad in Norway, for a fresh supply.

After a delay of two days, we set sail again; and on the morning of the fortieth day were moored in the Elbe, off Altona.

After the stillness of Iceland, the stir of Hamburg could not but be doubly felt by me. It seemed a new world; every thing was full of life and animation; but when I compared the poor and simple people whom I had left with those among whom I found myself, though I doubted whether the Icelandic adage, "Islander hinn besta lapa sem salen skinnar uppà,"—(Iceland is the best land the sun shines upon,)—would find any advocate out of it, I came to the conclusion that, as far as real happiness is concerned,

"An equal portion's dealt to all mankind."

END OF VOL. I.

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